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## HISTORIC PERSONALITY





# Historic Personality

BY

FRANCIS SEYMOUR STEVENSON  
M.P.

London  
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AND NEW YORK

1893

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## CONTENTS

### CHAPTER I

	PAGE
INTRODUCTORY . . . . .	I

### CHAPTER II

HISTORY . . . . .	10
-------------------	----

### CHAPTER III

BIOGRAPHY . . . . .	21
---------------------	----

### CHAPTER IV

AUTOBIOGRAPHY . . . . .	33
-------------------------	----

---

vi     *HISTORIC PERSONALITY*

CHAPTER V

	PAGE
DIARIES . . . . .	42

CHAPTER VI

MEMOIRS . . . . .	52
-------------------	----

CHAPTER VII

LETTERS . . . . .	65
-------------------	----

CHAPTER VIII

TABLE-TALK . . . . .	80
----------------------	----

CHAPTER IX

CHARACTERISATION . . . . .	90
----------------------------	----

CHAPTER X

MONUMENTAL INSCRIPTIONS . . . . .	102
-----------------------------------	-----

## *CONTENTS*

vii

### CHAPTER XI

	PAGE
PORTRAITURE . . . . .	113

### CHAPTER XII

IMAGINATIVE LITERATURE . . . . .	123
----------------------------------	-----



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY

AMONG the objects to the pursuit of which the human intellect is most addicted, and in which it takes the keenest pleasure, few can supply it with so large a measure of enjoyment as is afforded by the attempt to reproduce in the present the personality of the men who have been illustrious in the past. The extent to which such an attempt can succeed, depends upon a variety of causes. In some cases the materials are too scanty to admit of the formation of a correct conception ; in others, the abundance of materials is so great as to produce embarrassment by reason of their profuseness. In some instances, again, the character under consideration stands out in clear



and commanding outline ; in others, its individuality is less marked, and its type less pronounced. In all there is this feature in common, that the men of the past can never be reproduced in their entirety. It is so not merely because they are far removed from us in point of time. That in itself is not an insuperable obstacle. The difficulty is one which lies deeper. Their outward appearance may be known, their minutest actions may stand on record, their writings may convey to us the opinion they entertained of themselves, the conditions by which they were surrounded may have been carefully ascertained, the guiding motives by which they were actuated may admit of explanation : there still remains an all-important element which can never be adequately understood or expressed. By a man's personality, in fact, is meant not merely what he says or does, but what he thinks and feels : it includes the sum of all the dispositions, both mental and bodily, which make him what he is. His personality, therefore, is something impalpable, imponderable, impenetrable, which defies alike

definition and analysis ; not that it is in itself unknowable, but that to our finite understandings it is unknown.

With that reservation, however, the endeavour to bring before us as living presentments the bygone men of bygone ages, and to enable us to enter, within certain limits, into their thoughts and feelings, is a task to the accomplishment of which the multifarious energies of many minds have been devoted. True it is that the pursuit cannot be reduced to the precision of an exact science. True it is, also, that the tendency of historical research has been to make the consideration of personal character more and more subordinate to the examination of the general causes and of the general conditions which have from time to time brought about the great movements which constitute the landmarks in the development of civilisation. Nevertheless, as long as human nature remains the same, it may be confidently anticipated that the personal element in history will retain its hold upon mankind, and that the efforts to resuscitate the mighty spirits of the past, to infuse

into the dry bones the breath of life, and to carry on "dialogues of the dead" and "imaginary conversations" with the heroes of the world, will continue to exercise an irresistible charm, as well as a beneficial influence, upon the thoughtful mind.

To all who doubt the value and importance of laying stress on the personality in history, no more effective method of dispelling their scepticism can be suggested than that, with openness of mind and fulness of recollection, they should spend a few hours within the precincts of the Church of Santa Croce at Florence, and there ponder, amidst their solemn surroundings, over the part taken by the great men whose memory is there perpetuated, in moulding the destinies of their nation and of humanity itself. It is impossible to look upon the monument of Dante, or upon the tombs of Michael Angelo, Machiavelli, and Galileo, without reflecting on the importance of the individual in each of the departments of human activity exemplified in them. In poetry, in art, in politics, in science, every epoch of

progress is signalised by the appearance of some man or of some men whose function consists not merely in representing, but in directing, the tendencies of which they are the embodiment. Or, again, let any one pass in review, as he stands in Westminster Abbey, the successive generations of orators and poets, statesmen and warriors, philosophers and divines, by whose writings, or by whose actions, England has been rendered illustrious and the world has been enriched, and let him endeavour to picture to himself what manner of men they were, and what place should be assigned to each in human history. By that mental process he will arrive at a far juster estimate of what can be achieved by the individual than if he were to confine himself to the perusal of musty chronicles or to the study of bygone times with the elimination of the personal element. The imagination which idealises the character may, perhaps, be accompanied by imperfect acquaintance with the details; but the probability is that it will have the effect, at any rate in the vast majority of instances, of

imparting form, and fulness, and a right perspective, as well as a heightened interest, to data which, without its aid, would be isolated and misunderstood.

I propose to take a brief survey of the various modes by which the personality of eminent men can be expressed and realised. It is not enough to say that they live in their work, unless it be known to us not only in what their work consists, but how far it was the inevitable outcome of what was in them. The mere statement of their actions, even if it be fully recorded, is insufficient in itself to convey a clear conception of the character of the actors, unless supplemented by information derived from other sources. The writings which they may have left—unless they happen to be of a distinctly autobiographical nature, in which case they form a partial, and only a partial, exception—cast little more than a faint and dim light on the innermost feelings of the writers; for, in spite of the phrase, "*le style, c'est l'homme*," which, since the time of Buffon, it has been the fashion to repeat, it is only in rare instances that an author's

literary work is the genuine reflection of his personality, or that it supplies unmistakable indications of what he really was. It is easy to reconstruct a Montaigne out of his *Essays*: to reconstruct a Shakespeare out of his writings would be a task beyond the possibilities of human capacity. The works of some writers, again, are characterised by an irrepressible self-consciousness, which, however, seldom reveals the real self. The works of others are marked by an objectiveness which conceals their personality altogether.

Such being the difficulty, then, of arriving at a real understanding of a man's character from the mere consideration of his recorded acts or of his literary achievements, there remain various methods by which the object in view may be attained. First there is history, in the largest acceptance of the term, a whole composed of many parts; then there is biography, then autobiography, then diaries, then memoirs, then correspondence, then table-talk, then characterisation, then monumental inscriptions, then portrait-

ure, then imaginative literature. A short survey of each of these methods may, perhaps, suggest useful trains of thought, and supply a partial answer to the question, How do we know what was in men? How do we arrive at a perception of their resemblances and of their differences?

At this stage, however, of the inquiry the reflection occurs, how numerous are the men who have influenced the course of the world's history for good or for evil, but whose lives and whose actions have perished with them and left "not a wrack behind." Horace, long ago, referred to the brave men who had lived before Agamemnon, and who had died "unweepable" for lack of a poet to sing of their deeds. Sir Thomas Browne, in his *Urn Burial*, expresses a kindred thought in language equally striking. "The iniquity of oblivion," he says, "blindly scattereth her poppy, and deals with the memory of men without distinction to merit of perpetuity. Who can but pity the founder of the pyramids? Herostratus lives that burnt the temple of Diana, he is almost lost

that built it. Time hath spared the epitaph of Adrian's horse, confounded that of himself. . . . Who knows whether the best of men be known, or whether there be not more remarkable persons forgot, than any that stand remembered in the known account of time? Without the favour of the everlasting register the first man had been as unknown as the last, and Methuselah's long life had been his only chronicle."



## CHAPTER II

### HISTORY

HISTORY, which views men in their collective capacity, naturally covers more ground than biography, which deals with men as individuals. Attempts have been made to dis sever the one from the other by a broad line of demarcation. No doubt the historian who is of a scientific bent of mind prefers to trace out the general causes which have brought about the development of human affairs, and to keep the personal element as far as possible in the background, whilst he who, being of a poetic temperament, enters upon the same field of inquiry, is more likely to be interested in the lives and characters of particular persons who have played a conspicuous part in the great dramas which unfold them-

selves in the records of the past. It is impossible, however, to understand humanity as a whole without some knowledge of the component units, and it is equally impossible to realise to oneself the personality of eminent men, if one is ignorant of the influences by which they were surrounded. Hence, although a temporary separation may take place, at certain times and for certain purposes, between history and biography, no permanent divorce can ever be pronounced.

It is true that a vast improvement has been effected, especially of recent years, in the methods of historical investigation. Unverified tradition, unsifted gossip, and plausible guess-work have given way to critical examination. The researches of archæologists have opened new fields, and have produced results on which historians have based new conclusions. Mommsen, for example, has in great part rewritten the history of Rome by aid of the light afforded by monumental inscriptions. The historians of England have derived untold advantage from the publications of the Record Office. Ancient wills,


charters, documents of every kind, disinterred from national and municipal archives at home and abroad, or from the mouldy libraries of country houses, have yielded up their secrets. The correspondence of contemporaries has been exposed to view; mediæval account books have been searched; the inscriptions on tombstones and church bells have been reproduced; everything has been done, or is being done, to increase the volume of information at the disposal of the historian, whose duty it is to reduce it to order, harmony, and proportion, to arrange it in proper sequence and connection, and to evolve from it conclusions based not on preconceived notions, but on facts which are either definitely ascertained or submitted to the tests of probability.

The greater accuracy of treatment, however, and the greater systematisation of research to which historians have had recourse,—and which indeed affect biography as well as history, in view of the fact that the materials for both are derived from the same or from similar sources,—afford no sufficient ground for

neglecting the part played by individuals throughout the career of the human race. The tendency to minimise their significance is the result of a natural reaction against the former practice, common to most writers, of confusing cause with effect, by attributing to some one man the whole of the responsibility for a movement of which he was, at most, the guiding spirit, and without which, in any case, he would not have been in a position to influence the course of events. When philosophical views of history, such as those which find expression in the writings of Vico, Bodin, Montesquieu, Turgot, and Adam Smith, had once gained ground, and had secured the acceptance of thoughtful men, the previous mode of dealing with historical events was recognised to be inadequate and unsatisfactory. It was felt that it was no longer sufficient to chronicle the actions of particular men, and to compile annals of particular events, but that it was necessary to investigate the causes which had contributed to the general advance, and to the occasional retrogressions, of mankind. Moreover, the

comparative study of the customs and institutions of the various races and nations of the world has thrown a strong light upon aspects of history which had previously remained either unknown or neglected, and the result has been that the laws regulating the development of society have received a large amount of recognition and of attention at the expense, to some extent, of the consideration of individual characteristics.

The philosophical treatment of history, indeed, is not the exclusive prerogative of modern writers. Thucydides and Tacitus are as philosophical in their views, and as careful in their statements, as Machiavelli, or Gibbon, or Voltaire, or Macaulay; and Aristotle, in his *Politics*, surveys the working of constitutions with even more grasp and insight than Montesquieu in his *Esprit des Lois*. The difference consists rather in the greater extent of the domain with which modern historians have to deal, in the increased abundance of available materials, in the growing conception of humanity as a whole, and in the application of new methods, derived in part



from other branches of knowledge, to the task of elucidating the course of historical development.

Many a historian has surveyed the subject which he places before us in the light of some special train of thought, of some dominant idea in his mind. The English writers on ancient Greece may serve as an example. Mitford starts with the notion that Greece was inhabited by Whigs and Tories, and that the Tories were always in the right. Grote applies the lessons he learnt from the growth of English liberalism, as well as from the development of self-government in the Swiss cantons, and from their struggles at the time of the Sonderbund. Thirlwall is, before all things, scholarly. They thus supplement one another, and may in their turn be supplemented by aid of the light thrown by Curtius on questions connected with the origin of race, and with colonial and commercial activity. Mommsen, in the same way, is the first historian of Rome who has fully appreciated the importance of the economic aspects of the problems with which he deals. Gibbon, on his own

showing, exhibits the benefits gained by his parliamentary experience and even by his captaincy in the Hampshire militia, when describing the political and military history of the past. Macaulay throws himself with the ardour of a friend of progress into the party struggles of the Revolution. Every historian worthy of the name is animated by some leading idea, which enables him to group facts with greater clearness than would otherwise be possible, and to illustrate the past by the analogy of the present, while safeguarding himself against the abuse of historical parallels, in which the points of difference may be of more real importance than the points of agreement.

Whatever may be the range of thought of the historian, he finds himself compelled to assign due value and significance to the individual. Voltaire, who said that "the portraits of men are nearly all the creations of fancy; 'tis a monstrous piece of charlatanry to pretend to paint a personage with whom you have never lived," answered his own declaration by giving the most vivid portraits of



Louis XIV. and Charles XII., though it must be admitted that in both cases he had access to the best sources of information. Robertson, whose introductory chapters on the state of Europe from the subversion of the Roman Empire to the sixteenth century mark an epoch in historical literature, gives life to Charles V. and Francis I., and many another character in his pages. Mommsen makes a hero of Cæsar. Even Buckle, who has carried to its farthest lengths the theory that individuals have no real influence on the course of events, that the progress of mankind is governed by laws well-nigh as immutable as those which are known to science, and that climate, soil, food, and natural conditions generally are the determining factors, is obliged, somewhat inconsistently, to recognise the prominence of the part taken by Richelieu and many other great men in shaping the destinies of mankind. And Thorold Rogers, in his *History of Prices*, illustrates the long-continued influence which Henry VIII., by his destruction of the guilds and his debasement of the currency, has exercised on



the economic and industrial development of the English people.

The truth is that an appreciation of the laws of human progress enables us to understand with all the greater clearness the importance of individual acts and the value of individual character. It is difficult to imagine how a writer of the future could form a correct estimate of the latter half of the nineteenth century, if he left out of sight the personal influence of President Lincoln in the United States, of Prince Bismarck in Germany, and of Mr. Gladstone in England. With respect to each it might, no doubt, be urged, with more or less truth, that the movements with which they are identified would have taken place without them, and that their chief merit consists in the fact that they have perceived and represented the tendencies of their age and of their country. If it were so in every respect, the praise would be theirs. But who can deny that they have done more? Who can assert that they have not given the impulse which was necessary to secure the triumph of one cause, or the defeat of another, to

advance reform in this direction, to retard it in that? Does anybody suppose that the course of the world's history would not have been greatly affected, for evil or for good, if, for example, Hannibal had become master of Rome, if Cæsar had not crossed the Rubicon, if Rousseau had not written the *Social Contract*, and if Napoleon had not been born? Yet in each case it might be asserted with equal confidence that, if they had run counter to the spirit of their times, they would have been powerless to modify the course of events, and that it is only because they have embodied, each in his degree, the tendencies and aspirations of their age, that their names are landmarks in the history of the world.

History, then, whilst it covers a much wider field than biography, includes the latter within its scope. The best historians have often given us the best pictures of distinguished characters: the names of Tacitus, Clarendon, Gibbon, Macaulay at once suggest themselves to the mind as affording an illustration of that statement. For one who knows the general conditions of the times in

which great men have lived, it is easier to understand the influences by which their natures were moulded, and the atmosphere they breathed. The same methods of investigation, the same tests of truth, are applicable to history and to biography. In dealing with both it is necessary for the writer to approach his subject with a consciousness of the limitations of human faculties, and to be on his guard lest he should imagine that he has entered into the spirit of past times, when he has merely entered into his own, and called it by a different name. As Faust says to Wagner—

“Mein Freund, die Zeiten der Vergangenheit  
Sind uns ein Buch mit sieben Siegeln ;  
Was ihr den Geist der Zeiten heisst,  
Das ist im Grund der Herren eigner Geist,  
In dem die Zeiten sich bespiegeln.”

## CHAPTER III

### BIOGRAPHY

AMONG the varied products of literary activity biographical compositions have always exercised a powerful fascination over men's minds. It is said that the Chinese of the pre-Confucian period were in the habit of relieving the monotony of their existence by writing one another's lives. In classical times Xenophon, Plutarch, Sallust, and Suetonius carried the art to a pitch of excellence which, for vividness of delineation and elegance of style, has been rarely equalled and never surpassed. In more modern times the number of books relating to men's lives has grown with extraordinary rapidity. Concurrently with the increase in the world's civilised population, the ever-flowing stream of biographical

literature gathers volume and strength. It is a far cry from Bishop Bale's *Summary of the Illustrious Writers of Great Britain*, printed at Ipswich in 1548, to such monumental works as the *Biographie Universelle* or the *Dictionary of National Biography*; and, in the interval, how great has been the number of attempts to give prominence to the record of the careers and characteristics of eminent men! Of those whose reputation has survived them, how many owe the greater part of their distinction to the pen of their biographer! How many have been rescued from oblivion by his commemoration! How many have been exalted by his goodwill, or abased by his malignity!

The saying of Dr. Johnson that "nobody can write the life of a man but those who have eat and drank and lived in social intercourse with him," with which may be compared the similar utterance already quoted from Voltaire, would, if it were altogether true, exclude no inconsiderable proportion of the writings which have contributed to the delight and instruction of mankind. His

own *Lives of the Poets* would be among the first to be affected by the decree. The whole of Plutarch and the whole of Suetonius would have to be eliminated, and many of the masterpieces of biographical literature would be entirely out of court. The arguments, however, by which Johnson seeks to justify his view are worthy of consideration. "Biography," he remarks in the *Rambler*, "has often been allotted to writers who seem very little acquainted with the nature of their task, or very negligent about the performance. They rarely afford any other account than might be collected from public papers, but imagine themselves writing a life when they exhibit a chronological series of actions or preferments; and have so little regard to the manners or behaviour of their heroes, that more knowledge may be gained of a man's real character by a short conversation with one of his servants than by a formal and studied narrative, begun with his pedigree and ended with his funeral. . . . If a life be delayed till interest and envy are at an end, we may hope for impartiality, but

must expect little intelligence ; for the incidents which give excellence to biography are of a volatile and evanescent kind, such as soon escape the memory."

Boswell's *Life of Johnson* certainly furnishes an illustration of the truth of those observations, as it possesses a charm and a freshness to which no other biography can lay claim in the same degree ; the *Life of Wolsey*, by his gentleman-usher, Cavendish, excites an interest which would not be aroused by a writer of a later generation ; Mrs. Hutchinson's admirable memoir of her husband may be placed in the same category ; as also the *Life of Sir Walter Scott*, by his son-in-law, Lockhart ; and, among the productions of Greece and of Rome belonging to that department of literature, one is inclined to assign to Xenophon's life of his friend Agesilaus, and to Tacitus' life of his father-in-law, Agricola, a preference over the works of writers who were not personally acquainted with the men whose careers they describe. It is evident, however, that the instances in which a man of eminence has been fortunate in having in his *entourage* one who possessed




the ability to understand his motives, to appreciate the causes of his success or failure, and at the same time to supply the requisite literary expression, have been few and far between. In too many cases one is reminded of the saying that "no man is a hero to his valet," and of the famous retort, ascribed to Hegel, that it is so, "not because the hero is not a hero, but because the valet is a valet"; and few men of eminence could have applied to the friends who have written their lives the words which Shakespeare places in the mouth of Katharine of Arragon—

"After my death I wish no other herald,  
No other speaker of my living actions,  
To keep mine honour from corruption,  
But such an honest chronicler as Griffith."

Johnson's remark, too, is more applicable to ancient than to modern times. In the days before the invention of printing, and, still more, in the days when the mechanical appliances connected with the art of writing were in a rudimentary stage, the available materials were comparatively scarce, and personal knowledge on the part of the biographer was almost



essential as a guarantee of credibility. In modern times, when so much is committed to writing and so much to print, one of the principal functions of the biographer consists in the examination and sifting of documents, public and private, of letters, memoranda, extracts from the press, and of all existing materials which may help him to form an estimate and give an account of the personality he is endeavouring to reproduce. He is able to avail himself of everything that has previously been written, that in any way throws light upon his subject. Memoirs, table-talk, diaries, casual references in the letters, speeches and pamphlets of contemporaries, official records, are all called into requisition, in order that they may contribute their quota to the general fund of information on which his judgment has to be based. Personal knowledge, therefore, plays a comparatively subordinate part in his pages, though its presence unquestionably adds to the interest and value of the work, whilst its absence detracts from those merits in a corresponding degree.



It may be doubted, however, whether, under present conditions, it is not best that an interval of some length should elapse between a man's death and the appearance of his biography. In the first place, it is easier to form a dispassionate judgment, especially in cases in which the personality of the hero has produced a powerful impression upon the public mind, and has aroused a strong feeling of admiration or of dislike, when the unreasoning enthusiasm of friends and the animosity and rancour of opponents have subsided, and when the whole of the facts bearing upon the character can be set forth with artistic completeness and due regard for proportion. Even in the case of the men who have played a conspicuous part, but whose individuality is less striking, and who are, therefore, less capable of exciting conflicting passions in the breasts of their contemporaries, the same considerations hold good. Personal reminiscences are apt to be misleading, in so far as they only apply to some particular portion—generally the latter portion—of a career. Lord Cowper, for instance, in

his preface to Mr. Lloyd Sanders' edition of Lord Melbourne's papers, observes : "The glimpses which I can myself recall are rather in my way than otherwise in drawing his character. The image which I wish to form of the experienced and sagacious statesman in the full maturity of his powers, is continually blurred by my remembrance of the shattered invalid." Even Boswell gives us only a faint idea of the early part of Johnson's life, as compared with that which he presents after the commencement of the period of familiar intercourse, and to that extent, therefore, the work is lacking in proportion.

Another reason which may be urged in favour of postponing the publication of a biography, is the length of time which generally intervenes before the letters of an eminent man can be collected, owing partly to the number of hands into which they have fallen, and partly to the reluctance of their possessors to make them public. Voltaire, for instance, was so voluminous a writer that batches of his correspondence are even now recovered from time to time

and given to the world. The argument applies with even greater force to political personages, whose papers are rarely published in their entirety for a considerable period. All the works relating to Napoleon which appeared before the publication of his correspondence are of little value except from a literary point of view. In this country the appearance of the *Calendars of State Papers* and of the other publications of the Record Office has led to a revision of many judgments pronounced by historians and biographers upon the conduct and character of individuals. The opening of the archives of Simancas has thrown an entirely fresh light not only on Charles V. but on Henry VIII. And numberless instances might be adduced for the purpose of showing the modifications which the discovery of new facts has brought about in the conception of the characters of great men, though it must be admitted that, as a rule, there is a substantial agreement between the earlier and the later verdicts. At the same time it would be unreasonable to press this view too far, as in some cases one might

be compelled to wait for ever for the production of a biography, if the disclosure of the whole of the facts were a condition precedent to its publication.

The difficulties which beset the path of the biographer may be illustrated by a comparatively recent example. When Lord Campbell asked Lord Lyndhurst to supply him with materials for a life to be included in the *Lives of the Chancellors*, the latter replied: "Materials you shall have none from me; I have already burnt every letter and paper which could be useful to my biographer; therefore he is at liberty to follow his own inclination." The result was that the memoir was marred by serious inaccuracies, which were subsequently pointed out by Sir Theodore Martin, after a considerable number of Lord Lyndhurst's letters had been rescued from the hands of friends, and "the publication of memoirs and diaries by his contemporaries had become available to illustrate important passages in his life." The moral is that, especially in dealing with men who have been conspicuous in the political world, it is best to allow a

sufficient interval to elapse before attempting to reproduce their personality. Lord Campbell's own *Life*, on the other hand, furnishes an example of a case in which long delay is not required, as it is constructed entirely out of his own letters, with the addition of fragments of autobiography.

Some of the best biographies have been the work, not of sedentary recluses, but of men who have been actively engaged in the solution of the problems of their own generation. It is natural that such should be the case. History, as Freeman said, is past politics, politics are present history. In the study of the one and the pursuit of the other the same mental faculties find a scope for their exercise and a field for their development. The knowledge of human affairs gained by contact with the facts of the present, increases the power of discerning character and of weighing evidence. In the composition of biography that power is of the utmost value, and, when it is united with the qualities which make up literary excellence, it enables the writer to give vigour

and reality to the picture he presents. Among the works of contemporary authors are to be found conspicuous instances of the combination of political with biographical insight.

If it be the case that there exists in most biographers a tendency to what Macaulay called the *lues Boswelliana*, which induces them to idealise their hero, to palliate his shortcomings, and to assign to him a place in history higher than that to which his merits entitle him, the failing is perhaps excusable and certainly natural. The man who writes the life of another is obliged to show that his subject is of sufficient importance to deserve separate treatment, and of sufficient individuality to excite an appreciative interest. The greater the charm a biographer finds in his hero, the greater the charm he is likely to impart to his narrative, thereby communicating to the reader the feeling of which he is possessed, and conferring upon the world's greatest denizens the crown of immortality.

## CHAPTER IV

### AUTOBIOGRAPHY

AUTOBIOGRAPHY is a species of auricular confession, addressed to the ears of the world, and not, as a rule, inspired by a sense of the need for absolution. The interest which attaches to it does not depend as much upon the merits or demerits of the writer as a man, as upon the extent to which he takes the public into his confidence, discloses the motives by which he believes himself to have been actuated, and relates without reservation even the most trivial incidents that throw light, in his opinion, upon his life and character. It is essential therefore, that he should be endowed by nature with the possession of a certain amount of vanity ; and experience shows that the greater the measure meted out



to him, the more likely he is to produce a work characterised by a charm and flavour all its own, and by literary merit due to the spontaneity of its style. A man is generally interesting, because he is always interested, when speaking or writing about himself. Although it may be true that ethically *le moi est haïssable*, it is undoubtedly the fact that the most readable autobiographies are those the authors of which have started with the conviction firmly implanted in their minds that *le moi est adorable*, and that they were engaged upon the composition of a masterpiece relating to a subject surpassing all others in importance.

The motives, however, which may impel a man to sit down and write the story of his own life, may be, and, as a rule, are, altogether unconnected with any selfish aim. His object may be to convey instruction to those who come after him, and to enable others to benefit by the results of his own experience. He may wish to leave behind him permanent memorials of the impression conveyed to his mind by the movements in which he has taken a part, by the men



with whom he has come in contact, and by the contemplation of nature and nature's laws. He may feel the necessity for vindicating his course of conduct at a particular crisis in his life, or for justifying the general tenor and growth of his opinions by an *apologia pro vita sua*. He may be desirous of recording the inward struggle which has been carried on within him between conflicting principles and tendencies, with the object of warning others by his failure, or of encouraging them by his success. Or, again, he may be animated by a purely scientific spirit of inquiry, which prompts him to attempt, as a psychological experiment, the diagnosis and dissection of his innermost thoughts and feelings.

It is not, indeed, to be expected that a man's deepest self should reveal itself in his autobiography. Although it often happens that, as Matthew Arnold says—

“There arises an unspeakable desire  
After the knowledge of our buried life ;  
A thirst to spend our fire and restless force  
In tracking out our true, original course,”—

it is also true that—

"Many a man in his own breast then delves,  
But deep enough, alas ! none ever mines."

Apart, however, from that inherent incapacity to penetrate to a sufficient depth, there are other disqualifications which stand in the way of the complete reproduction of a man's personality in his own account of himself. The power of seeing ourselves as others see us is a gift granted to few or none. Moreover a man's verdict on his own life is apt to exhibit, in common with contemporary judgments, an absence of proportion and perspective consequent upon excessive proximity to the object under contemplation. There is a tendency on the part of the majority of those who have committed to writing the record of their lives, to pass lightly over certain incidents in their career and certain features of their character, while to other incidents and features they ascribe undue importance. The work, too, is one which they are necessarily compelled to carry out in advancing years, when, however retentive their memory may be, and however exuberant their energies, they are unable to recall or to realise the

thoughts, the feelings, the sensations, the aspirations of moments which have long passed away, and are no longer in touch with the atmosphere and environment of their younger days.

There is a remarkable paucity of autobiographical productions in the literature of the old world. If the maxim "know thyself" descended, as the poet says, from Heaven, it must have been destroyed, like some meteoric stone, on its passage to the earth. Even the introspective tendencies of the later Stoics did not have the effect of inducing men to write their own lives. Neither the *Manual* of Epictetus nor the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius partake of the nature of autobiographies, and it is only after Christianity has firmly established itself, and has succeeded in turning men's attention to the searching of their own hearts and consciences, that we find, in the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, the prototype of many similar outpourings of kindred spirits. When the Reformation came and accentuated the importance of faith, as compared with works, the practice of introspection found further

adepts, long after the intensity of the movement had become greatest. It is, perhaps, not a matter for surprise that three such different productions as Casaubon's *Ephemerides*, Rousseau's *Confessions*, and Amiel's *Journal Intime*, should have owed their origin to the religious atmosphere of Geneva. The first work consists of a diary of studies, interspersed with devotional comments. The *Confessions*, though written in England, when the writer was advanced in life, exhibit numerous traces of the Calvinistic view of human nature with which his childhood had been familiarised, and which had left an indelible impression upon his mind. The *Journal Intime*, while belonging to a totally different literary order, shows in a marked degree the influence of the train of thought against which the author means to protest, but which permeates him against his will. In other respects the last two works are poles apart. The *Journal Intime* has mainly an intellectual interest. The *Confessions* show, to use Rousseau's own words, "a man in all the truth of nature," with his

morbid egotism, his craving for admiration, his moral delinquencies, his occasional turpitude, his sensibility bordering upon insanity, and withal his broad sympathies and noble aspirations, a veritable combination of contradictory elements and temperaments. Amiel has, at any rate, fixed principles of conduct, guided by culture. In Rousseau we have, as Mr. Morley puts it, "the general empire of sensation over untrained intelligence."

In turning over the pages of such works as the *Confessions* of St. Augustine or of Rousseau, the reader is inclined to feel as if he were intruding on some domestic sorrow, or as if he were gaining possession of a secret which should not be entrusted to his keeping. It is somewhat of a relief to pass on to the autobiographies of men of action, like Benvenuto Cellini, in whom *la joie de vivre* comes out at every turn; or of calm, clear-sighted, self-satisfied men, like Gibbon; or of childish, frivolous men, like Goldoni; or even of commonplace men, like Cumberland or Lackington. Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit aus meinem Leben*, in spite of the admir-

able manner in which it treats the topics with which it deals, and the engrossing character of the narrative, is too dispassionate to excite the kind of interest which is usually aroused by an autobiography. John Stuart Mill's book belongs to an altogether different category : it is the record of an educational experiment rather than of a life, and, notwithstanding the glimpses it affords of the man himself, and the outbursts of feeling which it contains, its interest is principally of a philosophical nature.

Perhaps the most remarkable work of the kind in the English language is the life of Lord Herbert of Cherbury. It certainly affords an example of the absence of the sense of proportion in a man's estimate of his own character. Although the writer was a subtle metaphysician, a painstaking historian, and a poet of no mean worth, he makes virtually no reference to any of those pursuits, but prefers to pose as a courtier and a fop, and to base his reputation upon duels which never came off. As Mr. Sidney Lee observes in his Introduction to the *Life*, "the contrast between the



grounds on which he professed a desire to be remembered and those on which he deserved to be remembered by posterity, gives his book almost all its value." In these and other idiosyncrasies lies the principal charm of autobiography. The pleasure derived from the perusal of personal confessions is such, that defects of style and other imperfections are held of no account ; and although, as was pointed out at first, the author does not seek for absolution, the reader pronounces it of his own free will.



## CHAPTER V

### DIARIES

THE biographer has a secret desire to conceal his ignorance, the autobiographer to conceal his knowledge. The diarist has no temptation to conceal either the one or the other, in the first place, because he is describing what comes within his own cognisance, and, secondly, because, as a general rule, he is writing to suit his own purposes without any intention that his work should fall into the hands of others. There is, therefore, nothing, apart from the fluctuations of his own feelings and the changes in his modes of thought, to prevent him from setting down from day to day with perfect impartiality, and in all truth and fulness, the occurrences which appear to him to be most deserving of note, and

from commenting on the characters and actions of those with whom he comes in contact. His friends and neighbours, not suspecting that "a chiel's amang them taking notes," exhibit no reserve in their conversation and demeanour when they are in his presence, and are unaware of the process by which, as by an instantaneous photograph, he will give permanence to the impressions of the moment. His motives may be various. Perhaps he looks upon the practice as a useful mental discipline, or as a pleasant diversion. Perhaps he has been induced by the persons responsible for his early training to acquire and cultivate the habit of registering his observations of men and things, with the result that, after a time, it becomes ingrained. At any rate, the diarist worthy of the name is a faithful chronicler of what is said and done by himself, his acquaintances, and the world at large, and is, within certain limits, a contributor to the history of his own times, the value of his writings being commensurate with the range of his experiences, the receptivity of

his mind, and the accuracy of his record.

Much depends, no doubt, upon the object the writer has in view. If, for instance, he entertains the wish, or contemplates the possibility, that his productions may be read by his contemporaries or by posterity, he is likely to observe greater caution in his language and in his judgments than if his notes were intended for his own use only, and to allow the apprehension of external criticism to heighten or to soften the colouring of his facts. If, on the other hand, he keeps his diary, as Pepys did, for his own purposes exclusively, and takes precautions that its contents shall not become public property, either in the present or at any future time, there is nothing to prevent him from seizing and registering with absolute fidelity all that he sees and hears around him, with such modifications only as may be brought about by the variations of his own disposition, the waves of enthusiasm or of prejudice which may pass over him, and the subtle influence which surrounding conditions of life and of public

opinion invariably exercise, in a greater or a less degree, upon every mind. Pepys, indeed, far from wishing to communicate his journals to others, invented a system of shorthand of his own, partly for convenience' sake, and partly for the purpose of rendering the meaning unintelligible to all except himself; and it was only by an accident, most fortunate for posterity, that the contents of the work were revealed to the world. Evelyn, too, kept his secret well. He and Pepys were intimate friends; yet neither had any notion that the other was keeping a diary. "A most excellent person he is," writes Pepys of Evelyn, "and must be allowed a little for a little conceitedness," but no reference does he make to the work to which the latter owes most of his reputation.

The differences between the general character of the two diaries are interesting and instructive. Evelyn was a man of culture and refinement, who enjoyed ample opportunities of becoming intimately acquainted with the most eminent men of his day, and whose work covers more ground, alike in respect of time

and in respect of scope, than the diary of his contemporary. Yet, of the two, Pepys is the more delightful writer, owing to the simplicity of his style, and the unaffected manner in which he discloses minute personal characteristics, and imparts to his memoranda all the charm of an autobiography. His domestic economy, his good resolutions, his greediness, his sundry failings, his boyishness of spirits, are all placed before us with a fulness of detail which derives additional zest from the fact that publication was undesigned. For the light he throws on public events Evelyn may be more serviceable. As a picture of the manners and customs of a particular period Pepys' diary is without an equal.

The writer of a diary is generally one who, without being of any great eminence in his day, is in the enjoyment of an assured position. It is true that such men as the Emperor Titus have been known to keep a daily record of their acts. A really great man, however, has no leisure, and little inclination, for the task of chronicling day by day the


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events of his own time. His work is to produce, not to reproduce. Although he may, perhaps, devote his spare moments to the composition of historical and biographical works, it is impossible that he should keep a continuous diary of what is going on around him. There have, however, been men, such as Casaubon and Priestley, who have made daily notes of their studies, extending over the greater part of their lives, whilst introspective works of the nature of Amiel's *Journal* are really fragments of autobiography. On the other hand, it is necessary that the diarist should be in a position in which he is able to become personally acquainted with the men whose sayings and whose doings are worthy of being set down in writing. Thus Evelyn held, in the course of his life, a number of official posts. Pepys was Secretary to the Admiralty. Bubb Dodington was a glorified election agent. Fanny Burney was Keeper of the Robes. Charles Greville was Clerk of the Council. Crabb Robinson was a friend of most of the literary men of his time.

For the reasons which have been

given there are few sources from which it is as easy to derive a clear conception of the personality of eminent men as from the best diaries. One is enabled to form a more definite idea of the real characteristics of Melbourne and Palmerston from Greville's notes than from any other work which has been produced. It would be difficult to find a more vivid description of Madame de Staël than is to be found in Crabb Robinson's account of her visit to Weimar. It is true that the portraits thus presented are not the work of men endowed with the highest—that is, the creative—capacity ; if they were so endowed they would devote their abilities to objects other than the composition of diaries. Thence arises the superiority of the best letters over the best diaries : great men write the former, but rarely the latter. And yet how few there are who would part with their Pepys in exchange for the profoundest utterances of the world's greatest men !

The foregoing observations with respect to diaries apply mainly to those which extend over a considerable and



continuous period of time, as it is in them that the most characteristic features of that kind of composition are exhibited with most distinctness. There are, however, diaries extending over short intervals of time, which have been kept—sometimes by men of mediocrity, sometimes by men of real eminence—with the object of chronicling, for their own use or for the use of others, events of a specially memorable character, for the observation of which they enjoyed unusual opportunities, or for the purpose of conveying in a graphic form the ideas suggested to them by what they saw around them. To that order of writings belong books of travel in which the form of a journal is adopted. Arthur Young, in his *Travels in France*, lays down the principles by which productions of that character should be guided, and by his example gives force to his precepts. “The journal form,” he writes, “hath the advantage of carrying with it a greater degree of credibility, and, of course, more weight. A traveller who thus registers his observations is detected



the moment he writes of things he has not seen. On the other hand, there are some weighty inconveniences; among these is the prolixity to which a diary generally leads; the very mode of writing almost making it inevitable. Another capital objection is, that subjects of importance, instead of being treated *de suite* for illustration or comparison, are given by scraps as received, without order, and without connection." To the same class may be assigned works so different in nature and in object as Lord Ellenborough's *Political Diary*, from which little is to be learnt respecting human character, but in which the course of foreign affairs during a specific period is told from day to day with considerable accuracy, and Darwin's *Journal of a Voyage Round the World*, in which the phenomena of which the great naturalist became cognisant are presented with the insight of genius, and with all the clearness which is imparted to isolated facts when they are viewed in the light of great principles. It is evident, however, that works of that description fall within a category

other than that to which such diaries as those of Pepys may be said to belong, inasmuch as they do not throw any light — except perhaps incidentally — upon human personality.

## CHAPTER VI

### MEMOIRS

THE difference between memoirs and diaries is that, while the latter are a record kept from day to day, when the incidents are fresh in the writer's mind, the former, as the word implies, make a greater demand upon the retentiveness of the memory, owing to the fact that they are written some time after the events to which they relate have taken place. The diarist, therefore, is obliged to set down a number of independent and unconnected facts, showing the impression produced upon his mind at the time of their occurrence; whilst the author of memoirs is able to group and arrange facts in such a manner as to impart to them order and harmony, though, at the same time, he is no

longer able to describe them with the same degree of freshness as when the impression of the moment was still vivid. Usage, however, draws no hard-and-fast line of demarcation between the two species of composition, but is apt sometimes to include diaries under the name of memoirs. Whitelocke's *Memorials*, for instance, and Greville's *Memoirs*, are really diaries, in which they jot down at the time the observations suggested to them by what they see and hear. There is a difference, too, between memoirs and autobiography, inasmuch as they relate less to the writer's own personality than to the men with whom he has come in contact, and to the sayings and doings which have come within his cognisance. Memoirs, properly so called, are, in fact, a history of the author's own times, confined to those aspects which come within his own knowledge and experience. In interest and importance they rank among the foremost products of historical literature.

It is not necessary, in a memoir, that the writer should bring himself prominently to the front. It is sufficient that

his work should afford unmistakable indications that he is speaking out of the fulness of his own knowledge. Cæsar carried the impersonal tendency in his *Commentaries* so far as to speak of himself invariably in the third person, and Moltke, in his account of the Franco-German War, always refers to himself as the Chief of the Staff. Yet each of those works possesses, in a varying degree, an interest apart altogether from the importance of the events described, and due to the consciousness aroused in the reader's mind, even when the narrative is merely a dry record of facts, that he is acquiring his information at the hands of the best authority on the subject, and that he is obtaining an insight into the motives which have guided the course of action adopted by the masters of many legions at critical periods in the world's history. In all memoirs from the pens of great generals, there is a certain charm which is not to be found in the military records composed by men who are unacquainted with the real motives which led to the formation of decisions and the abandonment of resolutions.

Even the memoirs of Marmont and those of the numerous other generals of the Napoleonic army, have, in spite of their voluminous character, an abiding interest which is not confined to France, and which is not extinguished by the disappearance of the conditions which existed at that time. But, when historians devote their pages to the description of campaigns and battles, most of which neutralised one another, and about which they can only give information at second hand, there arises a natural feeling of impatience in the mind of the reader, who is not satisfied with the record of events of which the significance is mainly temporary and evanescent, and who looks for light to be thrown on the advance of civilisation, the growth of institutions, the spread of human happiness, and the characteristics of human nature.

"I am reading Burnet's *Own Times*," writes Charles Lamb. "Did you ever read that garrulous, pleasant history? full of scandal, which all true history is." Whatever may be thought of Lamb's view of history as a whole, it cannot be

denied that the merit and principal charm of memoirs consist in the extent to which the personal element—connected, that is, with the men and women to whom the writer refers—enters into their composition, while the deeper questions which agitate each successive generation, the problems to the solution of which it is called upon to apply itself, are either excluded altogether from consideration, or are treated with the light touch which makes difficulties vanish for a time, by minimising their importance or even by denying their existence. Burnet's *History*, no doubt, is superior to the general run of memoirs, as far as clearness of insight and grasp of facts are concerned. It belongs, however, to their charmed circle by virtue of the abundance of biographical reminiscences, agreeably and playfully written, by which it is characterised.

The earliest memoirs of modern times can scarcely be distinguished from the naïve chronicles which preceded them. Most of the mediæval historians combine, like Herodotus, a survey of the past with an account of the present. Froissart and Joinville may almost be classed

among memoir-writers, and Philippe de Commynes may be said to mark the transition stage. With the decay of feudalism, and the consolidation of the states-system which marks the end of the middle ages and the birth of a new epoch, the courts of the sovereigns of Europe attained to an importance and a splendour they did not possess before. They became the cynosure of all eyes, the source of all promotion, the focus of every intrigue. With their rise arose the memoir-writer, as he is best known to us. The atmosphere of courts, indeed, has generally been favourable to the production of memoirs. If they have sometimes degenerated into nothing more than a *chronique scandaleuse*, the cause is to be found in the soil from which they have sprung, and in the nourishment from which they have derived their sustenance. Yet it is some of the best memoirs which have shown most superiority to their surroundings. Among them may be classed the *Economies Royales* of Sully, whose work stands in marked contrast, alike with regard to choice of subjects and in respect of permanence of



interest, to the writings of his contemporary, Brantôme. Sully was a statesman greatly in advance of his times, and the breadth of his views is reflected in his memoirs. No livelier picture of the period of the Fronde is given than in the works of Cardinal de Retz, and La Rochefoucauld's memoirs rank in point of excellence next to his own maxims. No memoirs, however, for variety of interest and vigour of style, are equal to those in which Saint-Simon depicts the later years of Louis XIV. and the period of the Regency. Since his time the number of memoirs has increased to an extraordinary extent. At the time of the French Revolution they assume the most imposing dimensions. Madame Roland's reminiscences are the most interesting, as well as the best known, of those which belong to that time. There is, in fact, no period in the history of France, from the middle ages to the present day, which cannot be studied to advantage in the pages of memoirs, which constitute one of the most important as well as characteristic contributions which the French intellect has added to the fund from

which mankind draw their enjoyment and their instruction.

In the English language few works of that description, with the exception of the memoirs of Lord Hervey and of Horace Walpole, approach the best French memoirs in point of lightness of touch and elegance of diction. Hervey's memoirs show signs of the coarse influences of George II.'s court, in which the Graces, in spite of the presence of Lord Chesterfield, had not established their claim to sacrificial homage. The memoirs of Horace Walpole are not equal in merit to the letters upon which his title to literary fame mainly rests. Of the two, those of Lord Hervey are, indeed, the more interesting on account of his more intimate acquaintance with the mainsprings of the actions described. Much the same ground is covered by the two works, and there is a remarkable similarity between many of the anecdotes, which affords additional confirmation of their accuracy, though it may perhaps merely indicate a common source. As Croker says in his introduction to the former memoirs : " It must be recollected

that Horace professes to have heard all those matters from Sir Robert, from whom also Lord Hervey heard the most of what he did not himself see, and to whom he repeated all that he had in Sir Robert's absence observed." Lord Hervey himself lays down in clear language what he conceives to be the task of the memoir-writer: "I leave those ecclesiastical heroes of their own romances—De Retz and Burnet—to aim at that useless imaginary glory of being thought to influence every considerable event they relate; and I very freely declare that my part in this drama was only that of the chorus's in the ancient plays, who by being constantly on the stage, saw everything that was done, and made their own comments upon the scene, without mixing in the action or making any considerable figure in the performance." It must be confessed, however, that the conception is loftier than the execution, and that in none of the English memoirs of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, apart from diaries and autobiographies, do we find the charm of narrative and of style by

which such memoirs as those of Saint-Simon are characterised.

The capacity, indeed, of the French language for lucid and felicitous expression of minute shades of difference—a capacity to which it owes its adaptability to diplomatic purposes—finds special scope for its exercise in the composition of memoirs, as well as of letters. In the domain of history, in the larger acceptance of the term, as in the realm of poetry, the palm must undoubtedly be accorded to England. In the lighter walks of literature, however, one looks in vain for the grace, the refinement, the *engouement spirituel* of the French writers. Possibly La Bruyère may have assigned the true reason when he said: “A man born a Frenchman and a Christian finds himself restrained in satire; great subjects are forbidden to him; he essays them sometimes, and then turns aside to small things, which he elevates by the beauty of his genius and his style.” Or, as Carlyle, who of all men was perhaps least in sympathy with the French bent of mind, observes in his *Lectures on the History of Literature*,

"The French have in a remarkable manner the faculty of expressing themselves with precision and elegance to so singular a degree that no ideas or inventions can possibly become popularised till they are presented to the world by means of the French language." Whatever the cause may be, memoirs are a product which has found in France its most congenial soil, and has attained there to its most luxuriant growth.

Sir George Cornewall Lewis, in his essay on Lord Cornwallis, makes some valuable remarks on the relative importance of memoirs and of documents written at the exact time when the occurrences take place. "A historical memoir," he says, "may be compared with a medal, which is intended as a reminiscence, while an official despatch is like a coin, which is intended for currency in mercantile transactions. Nevertheless, a coin not less than a medal can be used as a historical testimony. . . . Letters and despatches, like journals entered from day to day, have this advantage over memoirs, that they exhibit faithfully the impressions of

the moment, and are written without knowledge of the ultimate result. They are, therefore, more trustworthy than any narrative composed after the whole series of events has been worked out, at a time when the narrator is tempted to suppress, or has learnt to forget, the proofs of his own want of foresight." At the same time Sir George Cornewall Lewis recognises the superiority of history composed by the actors in the events narrated over history composed by contemporary observers whose accounts, though free from the obscurity and fluctuations of tradition, "may be erroneous as to the springs of action and the causes of events; they may mistake the motives and characters of public men; they may adopt current popular prejudices and ignorant misrepresentations."

From the point of view of the reproduction of the personality of eminent men, there can be no doubt that contemporary memoirs, even when warped by excessive partiality, or by ungenerous animosity, are among the most valuable sources from which it is possible for us

to reconstitute in our minds the great men of the past. In spite of the superficial character of much of the literature called by the name of memoirs, posterity owes its lasting gratitude to the authors of those works. They may have been written, as Horace Walpole puts it, "by men with many faults of men with many faults;" but they enable us to drink large and undiluted draughts of the elixir of past times.



## CHAPTER VII

## LETTERS

JAMES HOWELL, in the first of his *Epistolæ Ho-Elianæ*, one of the most delightful productions of the seventeenth century, sets forth, in a style all his own, the qualities which should distinguish the art of which he was a master. "It was a quaint difference," he says, "the ancients did put 'twixt a letter and an oration; that the one should be attir'd like a woman, the other like a man: the latter of the two is allowed large side robes, as long periods, parentheses, similes, examples, and other parts of rhetorical flourishes; but a letter or epistle should be short-coated, and closely couch'd; a hungerlin becomes a letter more handsomely than a gown. Indeed we should write as we



speaking ; and that's a true familiar letter which expresses one's mind, as if he were discoursing with the party to whom he writes, in succinct and short terms. The tongue and the pen are both of them interpreters of the mind ; but I hold the pen to be the more faithful of the two. The tongue, *in udo posita*, being seated in a moist slippery place, may fail and falter in her sudden extemporal expressions ; but the pen having a greater advantage of premeditation, is not so subject to error, and leaves things behind it upon firm and authentic record."

It may be questioned whether the latter portion of Howell's remarks is altogether in accordance with truth. No doubt a man is more careful of the quality of his style, and of the accuracy of his facts, when he commits his thoughts to paper, even in the shape of letters addressed to familiar friends, than when he takes part in conversation. On the other hand, the greater amount of premeditation and carefulness involved in the composition of letters, owing to the consciousness on the part of the

writer that he is giving, or may be giving, a permanent form to the ideas which are passing through his mind, frequently act as obstacles to the free and unrestrained expression of his meaning. A certain reserve shows itself in his references to himself, a certain bias in his account of incidents. He places himself insensibly in the position of the persons by whom the letters will be read, and endeavours to secure their good opinion by implying a greater regard for their judgment than he really feels, and by imparting to his statements the degree of colouring or of shading which is likely to be most agreeable. He becomes, almost unconsciously, hypocritical in language and hypercritical in style. It is impossible to avoid the feeling that one would understand him better by hearing and seeing him, than by reading the deliberate account he gives of his own feelings, and of the facts with which he becomes acquainted.

Much depends, no doubt, upon the extent of the publicity which the writer anticipates for his letters. If he is writing in the confident expectation that the

person whom he is addressing will be the only one to whom the contents will be made known, he will naturally be more communicative and less reserved than if he were laying himself open to the criticisms of a wider circle of friends, or of the public generally. Dr. Johnson entertained strong opinions on that point. "It is now become," he says in 1781, "so much the fashion to publish letters that, in order to avoid it, I put as little into mine as I can ;" and, again, in a letter to Boswell, he declares : "I could now tell you why I should not write ; for who would write to men who publish the letters of their friends without their leave ?" Elsewhere, however, he says that "he did not choose they should be published in his lifetime, but had no objection to their appearing after his death." Hence it is that his letters are of less interest than the records of his conversation. For the same reason a diary represents a man's real views better than his letters : it is written for his own use, and is not produced—if it be produced at all—until after his death. The letter-writer, however, in common

with the diarist, is unable, as a rule, to perceive the general drift and tendency of the events he relates. He is a witness, or he hears from day to day, of the isolated facts of which he gives an account ; he retails the current gossip, with all its exaggerations and all its glosses ; he shares the prejudices and the partialities of his circle, and fails to see things in their proper perspective. From premises imperfectly verified he arrives at unsound conclusions. For historical purposes his views and his statements require to be confirmed, if possible, from other sources.

Yet, every allowance being made for the effects of self-consciousness or of impulsiveness on the part of the writer, the fact remains that there is scarcely any branch of literature from which so much pleasure is to be derived as from correspondence, and that there is none which enables the reader to enter to the same extent into the spirit of past times. It throws light on the topics of which it treats, on the persons to whom it relates, and on those to whom it is addressed, whilst it illuminates with an even

brighter glow the characteristics of the writer.

As far as our knowledge of topics and contemporary personages is concerned, some of the most valuable contributions to the record of the world's history are to be found in letters. It is impossible, for instance, to understand the course of events during the age of Cæsar — one of the most important periods in the career of the human race — without a careful study of Cicero's correspondence ; not that it is necessary to adopt his views of the political situation, or his verdicts on particular men ; but the casual references, the undesigned coincidences, the interspersed narratives, the literary criticisms, the pictures of men and manners drawn by a master of easy and graceful style, all combine to furnish the historian with an invaluable fund of information, the like of which is not to be found at his disposal when he deals with any other period of the old world. In the correspondence of the younger Pliny, again, what a flood of light is thrown on the events and on the men of the time ! In those letters

—so modern in tone—the reader learns about the character of Trajan and the nature of his government ; he listens to a scientific account of the eruption of Vesuvius and the destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum ; he ascertains the impression produced upon the Gallios of the day by the early Christians ; he is told of the methods of study by which the elder Pliny accumulated, and of the manner in which he dispersed, his vast stores of knowledge ; he hears details about the agriculture, the municipal life, the literature, the leading men of the day. The same considerations apply to the best letter-writers of modern times. In the seventeenth century, for instance, how greatly our information relating to the age of Louis XIV. is increased by such letters as those of Madame de Sévigné and Madame de Maintenon ! What a clear picture we are able to form of Cromwell's system of government by the perusal of his letters ! And, in the last century, how difficult it would be to unravel the threads of English history without the aid of the brilliant descriptions of life, character, and events

to be found in the letters of Horace Walpole!

Correspondence, too, throws light on the persons to whom it is addressed. There is a "give and take" in letters as in conversation, a subtle communication between mind and mind, which leads the writer so to vary his tone as to bring it into harmony with the mood of the friend with whom he is holding sympathetic intercourse. He adapts his choice of subjects, as well as his treatment of them, to the conditions imposed by the desire to please and interest the reader of his letter. It is so in the letters of Cicero to Atticus, in those of Horace Walpole to Sir Horace Mann, in those of Madame de Sévigné to her daughter. In some instances the recipient of a letter resembles a stage confidant—plays Pylades to the writer's Orestes, and merely encourages outpourings by an attitude of appreciative attention. In other cases there is an active interchange of ideas, as in the correspondence between Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet, or between Goethe and Schiller. In other cases, again, the

writer applies himself to the task of rebuking, commenting, or instructing the one whom he is addressing. The letters of Lord Chesterfield to his son, and the second series of letters written to his godson, may be cited as being among the best examples of the didactic style in epistolary composition. By observing the points on which the letters repeatedly lay stress, and by noting the lessons which they omit to inculcate, one infers with the utmost clearness what must have been the characteristics of the two Philips to whom they were addressed; one perceives that the first had more mind than manners, and that the second had more manners than mind. So, too, the letters of Voltaire to Frederick the Great, in what they say and in what they leave unsaid, make the character of the Prussian monarch stand out in clear relief.

The personality of the writer himself, however, is that which is most distinctly portrayed. He does not start with the deliberate intention of revealing, as in an autobiography, his own characteristics; but, by unconscious touches thrown in



here and there, he is more successful in disclosing his real self than if he had attempted to do so of set purpose. It is not so much from the facts he relates about himself, as from the general tenor of the letters, that it is possible to arrive at a correct estimate. In the case of Lord Chesterfield, for instance, it is interesting to read his own account of the speech he delivered in the House of Lords on the introduction of the new Calendar ; but it is still more interesting for one to picture to himself, as he turns over the pages, the calm, clear-sighted, urbane man of the world, endowed with more than the average share of human failings and frailties, but devoting himself, with unremitting attention and in all kindliness of heart, to the thankless task of instructing two youths who were hardly deserving of the pains bestowed upon their education. In the letters of Horace Walpole, again, we find at every turn traces not only of his vanity and his whimsicality, but of his clearness of insight and refinement of taste. Paul Louis Courier, one of the most vigorous letter-writers of the present century, is

also the one who most infuses his own personality into his correspondence, and who forces himself upon the reader's attention, not in an obtrusive fashion, but in such a way as to produce the pleasure which is always excited when writings are animated with the breath of life.

There are few species of compositions in which women have attained to such a degree of excellence as in letter-writing ; and the reason is to be found in the fact that they possess in an eminent degree the qualities which are most necessary for the purpose. Insight into character, intuitive sympathy, gracefulness and perspicuity of style, appreciation of detail, and lightness of touch, constitute the principal charm in correspondence, and fully atone for occasional rashness of judgment and want of ballast ; and it is not a matter for surprise, therefore, that the best letters should have been written by women, and, among them, by French-women. In Madame de Sévigné's letters those merits are united in an unparalleled degree, though for wit they are surpassed by those of Madame du Deffand, and for

ardour by those of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse. They combine the finish of the *salon* with the balmy atmosphere of a morning in May. In our own language there is, perhaps, no correspondence equal to that of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu for variety of interest, vividness of description, and brilliant vivacity of language. Writing to Lady Mar in 1724, she challenges comparison between herself and the great French authoress in the following words : " The last pleasure that fell in my way was Madame Sévigné's letters : very pretty they are, but I assert, without the least vanity, that mine will be full as entertaining forty years hence. I advise you, therefore, to put none of them to the use of waste paper." Lady Mary Wortley Montagu has an adventurous advantage derived from the glamour of the Eastern scenes she so often and so well describes ; but it may be doubted whether, in spite of the admirable qualities of her writings, she possesses in the same degree as Madame de Sévigné the faculty of making the most perfect art appear as fresh as if it had sprung from nature's own workshop. Leaving Madame de



Sévigné, however, out of the comparison, there is probably no other writer who is equal to her in that particular branch of literature. In the present century, again, women play a highly important part in the epistolary sphere of activity. Even Paul Louis Courier must yield to Madame de Staël and to George Sand, and, great as is the interest which attaches to the correspondence of Thomas Carlyle, and strong as is the light it casts on his own personality, it may be questioned whether the letters of Jane Welsh Carlyle will not enjoy a yet longer span of literary life. Even the men who have excelled in correspondence, such as Cicero, Pliny, Rousseau, Walpole, Gray, Cowper, Byron, Shelley, Lamb, have generally had something feminine in their nature. Of letters it may be said, as of much else, *das ewig Weibliche zieht uns heran*.

The art of letter-writing already shows symptoms of decay, partly owing to the greater pressure of modern existence, and to the consequent need for curtailing what is written to friends within brief limits, and partly owing to the fact that, since the introduction and spread of

newspapers, it is no longer necessary to commit to private correspondence, as was formerly the case, long accounts of what is said and done in the world. In days when the circle of literary men was small, criticisms of new works were constantly embodied in letters; now they live in periodical reviews. Even the letters of public men, in which they communicate to their friends and colleagues their views on important questions of policy, are far more concise than was formerly the case, and may therefore be expected to constitute a less important element in any future history of the present times, relatively to the place occupied by similar productions in days gone by; and diffuseness, in fact, only survives in official despatches intended for publication. At the same time the hurry of modern life, while producing terseness, has the beneficial tendency of inducing letter-writers to carry out the maxim of Dr. Paley, that the true epistolary style consists in speaking to the point. It is possible, therefore, that the appearance of decay may not signify real degeneracy, and that, as the outcome

of the present period of transition, a new style, at once clear, crisp, and epigrammatic, may come into vogue ; in which case not much will have been lost, and letters will continue, as before, to stereotype and perpetuate, for the benefit of future generations, the spirit of the times in which they are composed, and to make the characters of man an everlasting possession.

## CHAPTER VIII

### TABLE-TALK

OF all the volumes of anecdotes, facetiæ, ana, and table-talk which have from time to time appeared with the object of gratifying curiosity respecting the private opinions, sayings, and actions of eminent men, only an infinitesimal number are contributions towards our real knowledge of the personality of those to whom they relate. "They may be considered," as Charles Knight well puts it, "the lumber-room of literature, in which articles of all kind are found thrown together in confusion, and for the most part broken and useless, but which yet generally contain a good many curious things, and some intrinsically valuable,—the hurried strip-pings of richly-furnished apartments, which a revolution of fashion, or some



other accident, has dismissed to the multifarious repository."

The truth is that only a small number of the authors or compilers of those collections are in a position to guarantee the genuineness or authenticity of the sayings they ascribe to the persons of whom they treat. Most of them, too, instead of confining themselves to the consideration of a single character, range over a wide and almost unlimited field. Both of those features are combined in the three writers of the Roman Empire who are best known for having practised that species of composition. Valerius Maximus, Aulus Gellius, and Athenaeus all lived a long time after the men to whom they referred, and were therefore compelled to take their information from the writings of others. Moreover the work of the first, on "the memorable sayings and doings of the ancients," consists merely in a series of excerpts and anecdotes derived from various sources; the *Noctes Atticæ* of the second only purports to be what would now be called a "commonplace book," and the *Deipnosophistæ* of the third is a book



remarkable rather for the abundance of quotations it contains from writings now lost to us, than by reason of any peculiar merit of its own. In their range of subject and in their general character those productions resemble rather the *Curiosities of Literature* of Isaac Disraeli, though inferior to that work in point of excellence, than the ana or books of table-talk, which profess to place upon record the actual conversation of particular persons.

Assuming, however, that the book of table-talk limits its purview to the reproduction of the sayings and, perhaps, the doings of some one man, and that the compiler is, as nearly as possible, a contemporary, there remains the possibility that the serviceableness of the work may be impaired by a variety of causes. For instance, the author may be disqualified for his task on the ground that he is imperfectly acquainted with the subject. He may retail at second hand stories based, it may be, upon a substratum of fact, but built up by the aid of imagination. Everybody is acquainted from personal experience with the rapidity with which, in everyday life, reports are

put into circulation, and are transmitted in a more or less exaggerated form from one person to another. To judge of the eminent Frenchmen of the seventeenth or eighteenth century by the ordinary ana of that period, would be as unjust to their memory as it would be for the historian of the future to base his opinion of public men of the present day upon the statements to be found in the society journals or in the London letters of provincial newspapers. Except in the best collections of ana, the current gossip is repeated with all its deviations from the truth—geese are metamorphosed into swans, molehills into mountains, and the thousand nothings of the hour are magnified out of all shape and out of all proportion.

Moreover it is not, as a rule, the most competent person who has devoted himself to the task of recording the conversations of eminent men. The work has generally devolved upon those who were little qualified to appreciate the wit or wisdom of those to whom they listened. The so-called table-talk of Luther, for instance, conveys only the

faintest idea of his personality, and is not only dull in itself, but a cause that dulness is in others. It is not, however, the most acute thinker that makes the best compiler of table-talk. The *Memorabilia* of Xenophon, to take one example, enable the reader to form a far truer and more vivid conception of what Socrates was, and what he said, than can be derived from the Platonic dialogues; for, while Xenophon merely repeats and reproduces faithfully what he heard and what he saw, Plato, by reason of his superior power of intellect, and by virtue of his more subjective method of treatment, so mingles his own personality with that of Socrates, that it is scarcely possible to dis sever the one from the other, or to know which are the thoughts of the master and which are those of the disciple.

Since the production of the ana relating to Scaliger and Du Perron and De Thou towards the middle of the seventeenth century, the number of books of that description has enormously increased. To many of those works might be applied the language used by Mark Patti-



son with reference to the *Casauboniana*: "The gossips found in it no scandal, the curious no autobiography, the learned no original criticism." Writing in 1743, the Abbé d'Olivet speaks of *ces satires anonymes, ces Ana, ces gazettes littéraires, dont le nombre se multiplie impunément tous les jours à la honte de ce siècle*. In this country it may be said that Boswell's *Life of Johnson* is not only the best biography but the best book of table-talk in the language. Among works, however, which are distinctively of the nature of *ana*, it would be difficult to find any more interesting than the table-talk of Selden and the table-talk of Coleridge. In both instances the work was accomplished by competent hands, and in both we have a record of conversation without the addition of extraneous matter. Milward and H. N. Coleridge alike had the fullest opportunities of taking down in writing what was most worthy of preservation in the familiar utterances of the great men at whose feet they sat, and possessed at the same time the necessary discrimination. It is true that, in the case of Milward's

book, the sense is sometimes obscured by grammatical errors for which Selden cannot be held responsible, and that the alphabetical arrangement, though convenient for purposes of reference, is apt to lead to chronological confusion, and to prevent the reader from understanding what were the circumstances which gave rise to the various sayings. Nevertheless the work, as a whole, exhibits in a remarkable manner the admirable lucidity and insight of the great jurist, and his power of apt illustration, and fully justifies the opinion of Dr. Johnson that it was better than any of the French *ana.*

The latest editor of Selden's table-talk, Mr. S. H. Reynolds, says with truth that whilst "in writing a man may go on unchecked to his own satisfaction and to the impatience of his readers, in the to-and-fro toss of conversation he is under more effective restraint, and he becomes short and incisive in just the degree in which he is possessed of the conversational art;" and he notes that "in this art Selden unquestionably excelled." The same remark might apply

to the case of Coleridge, with the difference that his conversation was too much of the nature of a monologue, and not sufficiently interspersed with what Sydney Smith called "brilliant flashes of silence." The pith, however, of his thoughts on philosophical and literary subjects is expressed in the most telling way in his table-talk. As a thinker, in fact, his reputation is better safeguarded by that work than by the *Aids to Reflection*, or any other prose writings of his own, though as a poet he is immortal. And it may be asserted without risk of contradiction that Selden's ideas will live in his table-talk, when the *History of Tithes* and the other monuments of his vast learning have long been buried in oblivion.

Towards the close of the *Journal of a Tour in the Hebrides* Boswell observes : "It may be objected by some persons, as it has been by one of my friends, that he who has the power of thus exhibiting a correct transcript of conversations is not a desirable member of society. I repeat the answer which I made to that friend : 'Few, very few, need be afraid

that their sayings will be recorded. Can it be imagined that I would take the trouble to gather what grows on every hedge, because I have collected such fruits as the Nonpareil and the Bon Chretien?'" The capacity, however, for furnishing materials for a volume of table-talk depends not upon a man's greatness, but upon his faculty for giving to his conversation an incisive, suggestive, and even epigrammatic turn ; and, inasmuch as language may serve not only for the expression, but also, according to the saying, for the concealment of thought, there is always the possibility that even the familiar discourses of a man may, in some cases, have the effect of obscuring, in part at least, his real personality. Lord Burleigh's nod may admit of diverse interpretations, and the conversation of a Talleyrand, however charming it may be, throws but little light upon his real mind. Nevertheless it is impossible to dissent from the following sentences, with which Boswell continues his reflections : "How delighted should we have been, if thus introduced into the company of Shake-

speare or of Dryden! What pleasure would it have given us to have known their petty habits, their characteristic manners, their modes of composition, and their genuine opinion of preceding writers and of their contemporaries! All these are now irrecoverably lost. Considering how many of the strongest and most brilliant effusions of exalted intellect must have perished, how much is it to be regretted that all men of distinguished wisdom and wit have not been attended by friends of taste enough to relish and abilities enough to register their conversation!"



## CHAPTER IX

### CHARACTERISATION

FROM the earliest times it has been the practice of the moral teachers of the world to mark out for delineation some character in which there is a distinctive predominance of some particular virtue or of some particular vice, with the object of holding it out either as a pattern to be imitated, or as an example of what should be avoided. The Proverbs of Solomon, especially in the picture they present of the slothful man, who "saith, there is a lion in the way," who "roasteth not what he took in hunting," who "hideth his hand in his bosom" because "it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth," and who, withal, "is wiser in his own conceit than seven men who can render a reason," afford a very remarkable instance of

what may be termed characterisation. Aristotle, in his *Ethics*, can give us no better account of high-mindedness than by examining the characteristics of those who have possessed that quality in a marked degree, and he applies the same process to the task of defining and describing the other virtues, such as courage, temperance, liberality, and so forth, together with their opposites. His sketches exhibit marvellous insight into human nature, and singular power of discriminating between various shades of character. In the *Rhetoric*, too, he follows a similar line of thought, but in a less scientific manner and with a more practical object. The work of Theophrastus, however, which has served as a model for many subsequent productions of like scope, and which was composed when its author was ninety-nine years of age, is, in some respects, of even greater interest, inasmuch as it is written, not from the conscious and ostensible motive of inculcating and illustrating definite moral truths, but for the artistic purpose of giving pleasure by drawing particular characters in clear and bold outline.

Among modern writers La Bruyère excels all others in that particular department of literature. The later editions of his celebrated work are most deserving of attention, as the earlier editions contain principally general reflections illustrated by few examples, and exhibiting scarcely any of the characteristic features of the author's method. The *verve* of his style, the wit of his observations, and the truthfulness of his delineation, place him above all competitors. It may be doubted, however, whether Sir Thomas Overbury, who is chronologically anterior to La Bruyère, is not entitled to a higher place than that which is usually accorded to him. The disquisitions on the subject of his tragic death have had the effect of throwing into the background the recollection of the prose writings in which he unites a quaint and almost euphuistic turn of sentence with considerable insight into human nature, while by the quality of his sarcasm he anticipates the author of *Hudibras*. Characterisation, indeed, was a favourite form of literature at that period, as may be inferred from the number of works of which "The Man in

the Moone," Bishop Earle's *Microcosmography*, Bishop Hall's *Characters of Virtues and Vices*, and, in some measure, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* may be taken as types. Perhaps the reason is to be found in the impulse given to the study of character by the great revival of the drama in the age of Elizabeth. There is all the difference in the world, however, between the characterisation which makes the most of one particular feature in a man's disposition, and the dramatic representation of the whole of his nature. In the present century, George Eliot's *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* do not exhibit the writer's knowledge of human nature in the same degree as the earlier and more imaginative productions of the great novelist's pen; and, indeed, the best specimens of characterisation are to be found, not in books specially and avowedly devoted to that object, but in the best works of fiction.

All characterisations after the manner of Theophrastus represent an advance upon the early stage in the history of the human intellect, in which everything

has to be viewed in the concrete, owing to the difficulty felt by the mind in grasping abstract ideas. It is to that stage, for instance, that the Homeric poems belong ; and, in our own literature, the difference between the concrete and the abstract way of regarding things may be gauged by the difference which exists, say, between Chaucer and Browning. Characterisation belongs to an intermediate stage in the development of human thought. On the one hand it is not satisfied with the mere enumeration of unconnected particulars, and the absence of all generalisation ; on the other, it has not yet eliminated the concrete element altogether. To take an example, the writer who has not passed beyond the first phase is unable to form a conception of courage in the abstract, and can only give an account of the actions of this or that courageous man ; the writer of the third phase defines, analyses, and describes courage, as it is in itself ; whilst a Theophrastus or a La Bruyère presents to us a picture of the courageous man, as a type and embodiment of courage, and

gives an account of the various ways in which that virtue can be made manifest.

Comparisons have often been made between the *Pensées* of Pascal, the *Maxims* of La Rochefoucauld, and the *Characters* of La Bruyère. Yet, though all three works relate to character, the first two can hardly be called characterisation, but belong rather to the stage of thought in which things are viewed in the abstract. In all three there is the same vigour of expression, the same terseness of style, the same interest in human nature. The *Pensées* of Pascal, however, consist of general reflections, principally bearing upon conduct, and do not attempt, except incidentally, to depict particular aspects of character as exemplified in individual instances; while the *Maxims* of La Rochefoucauld are pithy aphorisms in which truths relating to character are set forth with cynical frankness. La Bruyère, on the other hand, in dealing with the various qualities or defects inherent in human nature, is in the habit of collecting all the facts that bear upon the subject under consideration, and all the examples

which may be adduced for the purpose of illustration, and with which he is furnished by his experience and observation of men and things; out of those facts and examples he constructs a character, representing, in most cases, some person with whom he is actually acquainted, but differing from the reality in so far as it is composed of only one element, and to the person in whom that character is embodied he ascribes the sayings and the actions which may be supposed to be the inevitable outcome of that particular disposition. "La Bruyère," says Vauvenargues, "was a great painter, and was not perhaps a great philosopher. La Rochefoucauld was a philosopher, without being a painter." Elsewhere he points out that "it is easier to characterise a man, than to make a man characterise himself," as is done in a tragedy or a comedy. It is less difficult to attain to a high pitch of excellence in the department of literature with which Theophrastus and La Bruyère are identified, than to follow at a long distance in the footsteps of a Shakespeare or a Molière. In the latter

case it is necessary to create a character in all its complexity ; in the former case it is sufficient to reproduce and to amplify one element in a character. The practical value of the art, however, is considerable, alike to the writer and to the reader ; and it is not without reason that Lord Chesterfield advises his son to "read La Bruyère in the morning, and see in the evening whether his pictures are like." "Most of them," he says, "are finely drawn and highly coloured. Furnish your mind with them first ; and when you meet with their likeness, as you will every day, they will strike you the more. You will compare every feature with the original, and both will reciprocally help you to discover the beauties and the blemishes."

As far as our knowledge of the personality of particular men is concerned, less is to be learnt from characterisation than from many other forms of literary effort. It is true that, incidentally, writings of that description throw light upon the conditions of life prevalent at the time when they were composed. It is true, also, that the writers generally



base their account of some character upon their recollection or experience of some man who illustrated in his own person in a conspicuous manner the quality to which they refer. Aristotle, for instance, is supposed to have had Alexander the Great in his mind when he wrote about the courageous man. La Bruyère, when he described real greatness, was thinking of the Prince de Condé, and, when he depicted the absent-minded man, of the Comte de Brancas. It must be remembered, however, that all those characters are incomplete, inasmuch as they only present one particular aspect to our view. No character, as a matter of fact, is composed of only one element : it is invariably a more or less complex admixture, in which many tendencies are united. What Dryden says, in his delineation of the Duke of Buckingham as Zimri, is true, in a less degree, of every human personality :

“A man so various that he seemed to be  
Not one, but all mankind’s epitome.”

Every character is a microcosm, a little world, in which envy, hatred, malice, and

all uncharitableness struggle for mastery with what Wordsworth called the "benign tendencies in human nature," and which is marked by the co-existence of contrary opinions, and the ebb and flow of changing feelings. The utmost that can be said on behalf of characterisation is, that it singles out, and gives supreme importance to, whatever happens to be the dominant element, the *leit-motiv*, in a man's character, and, by subordinating to it every other element, enables it to stand out in the clearest relief, so as to rivet attention upon its nature.

Such works as Chesterfield's characters belong to a different order, inasmuch as they relate to particular men who have had a real existence, examine the distinctive features by which their lives have been marked, and endeavour to analyse the motives and mainsprings of their actions by reference to the whole of their mental dispositions. It is evident, therefore, that those productions do not belong to the same category as the characters of Theophrastus or La Bruyère, though they exhibit a similar

skill in the delineation of human nature, but are analogous to the portraits which are to be found here and there in *mémoires*, or, indeed, in any historical or biographical work, with the difference that they are presented in a detached form, unaccompanied by any account of what has been said or done by the persons in question. It is assumed that the reader is already acquainted with the record of their lives, and that he is only desirous of arriving at a general estimate of their character. In form those writings bear some resemblance to a series of portraits by Clarendon, taken out of their context and published separately. The value to be attached to them depends upon the extent of the writer's knowledge, insight, and truthfulness, and may be submitted to the same tests as those which are applicable to the other recognised methods of giving an account of a man's personality. Owing, however, to their brevity, and to the necessity felt by the author for imparting to his thoughts the liveliest expression and the most telling form, they are apt to aim at epigram rather than at accuracy, and to *sacrifier*

*au mot.* The portraits which Juvenal, or Dryden, or Pope give of their contemporaries, generally under fictitious names, may be classed in the same department of literature as Chesterfield's characters, in so far as they represent real personages, while the judgment formed of their character is set forth as a whole, complete in itself. Full allowance, however, has to be made not only for the effects of poetic license, but for the exaggerations which are the inseparable concomitants of caricature and satire.

## CHAPTER X

### MONUMENTAL INSCRIPTIONS

IF the amount of information afforded by epitaphs were to be taken as the measure of the value to be assigned to monumental inscriptions, viewed as contributions to our knowledge of the lives and characters of eminent men, the importance to be attributed to them would be reduced to the smallest proportions. Statements possessing a chronological interest may, no doubt, be found in epitaphs, throwing light, for example, on the respective dates of a man's birth, marriage, and death. When the qualities of his mind and heart, however, and the actions of his life, are described, so much allowance has to be made for excess of eulogy and for the omission of essential features, that it is



necessary to judge them by a standard of truth wholly removed from that which is applicable to ordinary works relating to a man's existence.

Johnson, whose skill in the composition of epitaphs was considerable, and whose opinion is therefore of special value, observes with truth, in his *Essay* on this subject, that "it is not always necessary to recount the actions of a hero, or enumerate the actions of a philosopher; to imagine such information necessary, is to detract from their characters, or to suppose their works mortal, or their achievements in danger of being forgotten." And, again, he says that "no man ought to be commended for virtues which he never possessed, but whoever is curious to know his faults must inquire after them in other places; the monuments of the dead are not intended to perpetuate the memory of crimes, but to exhibit patterns of virtue. On the tomb of Mæcenas his luxury is not to be mentioned with his munificence, nor is the proscription to find a place on the monument of Augustus." Elsewhere it is related that, in conversa-

tion with Dr. Burney, he gave utterance to the memorable remark, that "in lapidary inscriptions the writer is not upon oath."

It is impossible to deny that epitaphs present numerous instances of beautiful thoughts and pathetic language, and that they are capable, in many cases, of giving rise to deep thoughts in the minds of the passers-by. Everybody is familiar with the noble passage with which Addison concludes his celebrated paper in the *Spectator*. "When I look upon the tombs of the great," he writes, "every emotion of envy dies in me; when I read the epitaphs of the beautiful, every inordinate desire goes out; when I meet with the grief of parents upon a tombstone, my heart melts with compassion; when I see the tombs of the parents themselves, I consider the vanity of grieving for those whom we must quickly follow. When I see kings lying by those who deposed them, when I consider rival wits placed side by side, or the holy men that divided the world with their contests and disputes, I reflect with sorrow and astonishment on the little

competitions, factions, and debates of mankind. When I read the several dates of the tombs, of some that died yesterday, and some six hundred years ago, I consider that great day when we shall all of us be contemporaries, and make our appearance together."

Reflections of that kind, however, are aroused by the sight of the tombs of men, or by the contemplation of their lives and deaths, far more than by the perusal of epitaphs, which are rarely truthful, often grotesque, and always inadequate presentments of the person they profess to commemorate. It is so even in the case of the epitaphs which are regarded as possessing the largest amount of literary excellence and epigrammatic flavour, as for instance, the lines of Pope intended for Newton, but not inscribed on his tomb:

"Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night :  
God said, 'Let Newton be'—and all was light."

The work of previous investigators and discoverers in the realm of science is here ignored altogether, and a claim put forward which Newton himself would



have been the last to assert. One turns with a feeling of relief to epitaphs in which the name alone of the great man is recorded, unaccompanied by bombastic panegyric, or by a detailed rehearsal of his writings or actions, which may well be allowed to remain treasured in the public remembrance, without the artificial and adventitious aid afforded by such devices.


An entirely different attitude may, however, be adopted with regard to the monumental inscriptions of ancient times. Modern epitaphs merely supplement the information to be obtained, as a rule, from a multitudinous array of other means of information. In the case of ancient inscriptions—whether they be of the nature of epitaphs, or whether they belong to another order altogether—they are often the only available sources from which our knowledge of men and of events can be derived. In the history of Greece and of Rome, indeed, owing to the mass of literary materials, they constitute additions to our fund of knowledge relating to those periods, rather than the basis on which is raised the

superstructure of the edifice. As Mr. Hicks observes in the introduction to his collection of Greek inscriptions, "the information they yield is indirect: it is like examining mediæval charters, or financial state-papers, or the letters and other documents of the Record Office, for the illustration of English history." Their importance, therefore, is very considerable; and, in the case of the history of Rome, with respect to which the abundance of available inscriptions is far greater, the light they throw on many aspects of the political and social life of the times is so intense, particularly on subjects connected with provincial administration, that the most recent historians have been obliged to reverse many verdicts previously passed without demur, and to draw entirely new conclusions from the material at their disposal.

The light which they throw, however, illuminates rather the general course of events, the prevalence of customs, and the development of institutions, than the character and conduct of particular men. In days of literary activity less is

committed to stone and brass, more to papyrus, or vellum, or paper. If, however, one includes within the knowledge to be derived from inscriptions, that which is revealed by coins and gems and medals, the sum of information furnished by those various sources becomes so great, even in the case of Greece and Rome, as to be worthy, from the historical point of view, of a place by the side of what we know through the writings of contemporaries.

It is, however, in its bearing upon the ancient history of Egypt and of the East that the value of inscriptions becomes of paramount importance, partly on account of the scantiness of literary material created at the time, partly by reason of the fact that most of what has been created has been destroyed, except when written on imperishable substances. Examples of the literature of remote antiquity such as are preserved to us in the papyrus copies of Pentaur's poems, and the sundry scientific and medical treatises which have been unearthed, are so rare, as to bring into stronger relief the real value of inscriptions as records



of a time which would otherwise have left but little trace in the pages of history. The study of Egyptian hieroglyphics is a domain in which the qualifications of the archæologist and those of the historian require at the present time to be united in one and the same person, and the results obtained are a contribution to our knowledge not only of events but of men.

It is in this manner, for example, that we are made acquainted with the personality of Rameses the Great. In the temple of Abû-Simbel, in Nubia, as well as in those of Luxor, Thebes, and Abydos, we find depicted in great detail and with elaborate explanations the record of his warlike achievements. We have his titles, his portraits, his statues, his wooden mask, his mummy; we have his favourite mottoes, and we know something of his taste in books. And it is not on the Egyptians alone that the inscriptions of Egypt throw light. The many races and nations that came in contact with that country for nearly five thousand years before the Christian era—reaching to a time anterior to Arch-

bishop Usher's estimate of the date of the creation—have left permanent traces of themselves. We are told, for instance, that the potsherds found by Mr. Petrie in the Fayûm, and inscribed with Greek characters, "carry back the history of the Greek alphabet to a period earlier than the date of the Exodus, and six centuries earlier than any Greek inscriptions known." At the same time it is of the utmost importance, in dealing with inscriptions, to avoid rash hypotheses which darken counsel, and to proceed with the greatest caution in the formation of general conclusions, in the almost entire absence of contemporary records other than inscriptions, and in the absence—for the present, at any rate—of a continuous narrative such as would be afforded by the lost history of Manetho.

Perhaps it is when one is brought face to face with undeciphered inscriptions that the enormous value of the progress which has actually been achieved in archæological research is most completely realised. In the museum at Perugia, for instance, stands a travertine slab, three and a half feet high, twenty-one inches



wide, and ten deep, with an Etruscan inscription forty-five lines long, written on two of the sides. Every letter is distinct, and every letter is known, but not one word has been interpreted. It has been variously assumed to be a religious ordinance, an agrarian statute, an obituary record, and a notice to navigators. Many efforts have been made to explain it, but hitherto in vain. Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Erse, Armenian, Basque, have all been tested, as affording a possible clue to the meaning ; but, until some discovery is made analogous to that of the Rosetta stone, there is no reason for supposing that the Etruscan language will remain other than a sealed book. Perhaps the necessary clue may ultimately be furnished by a comparison with the Etruscan characters which have been found to be inscribed on the linen bands that enshroud an Egyptian mummy in a Croatian museum. In the meantime, in the presence of an unsolved problem of that character, it is impossible not to entertain a feeling of gratitude towards the explorers and discoverers who, in other lands and other climes, whether in

Egypt or in Assyria, in Mexico or in the land of the Hittites, are restoring life and language to the men of a remote past, in comparison with which Pericles and Sophocles, Cæsar and Virgil, are but the creatures of yesterday.



## CHAPTER XI

### PORTRAITURE

THE value of portraiture as an aid to the formation of adequate conceptions of the men who have lived in days gone by can easily be overestimated. Even if it be admitted that the physiognomist is justified in the conclusions which he endeavours to draw from the appearance of the countenance, and that the phrenologist has good grounds for inferring the aptitudes of a man from the configuration of his skull, the extent to which a Lavater or a Spurzheim would be able to reproduce the characteristics of eminent men from an examination of their portraits or of their busts, would be necessarily conditioned by the fact that it is impossible to know with any degree of certainty whether a likeness



perfect in every respect has been secured. It is difficult to base conclusions upon an instantaneous photograph, or even upon a series of photographs, in which a man is represented at various periods of his life ; and still greater must be the difficulty of judging a character by means of a portrait. Possibly it may have been developed from a rapid sketch ; possibly a good many sittings may have been given. The idiosyncrasies of the artist and the extent of the subject's self-consciousness have to be taken into account. Inartistic accuracy of detail, producing an erroneous impression of the whole, may be a marked feature of the portrait ; or, again, imagination may have metamorphosed the actual into the ideal. The precise degree of resemblance cannot be fully known, and it is therefore necessary to make considerable allowances for deviations from the truth.

Moreover, a portrait taken at some particular period in a man's life, and representing him under the influence of some particular mood, cannot possibly do justice to the varied aspects of his nature. It is true that, as Archdeacon

Hare puts it (in *Guesses at Truth*), a portrait should represent "a life which shall have the calm of permanence, not the fitful flush of the moment ; an expression which shall exhibit the entire and enduring character, not the casual predominance of some temporary feeling." As a matter of fact, it is impossible to dissociate the picture from the impression produced upon the artist's mind, at the time of the process, by the one whom he is painting ; otherwise there would be no reality in the work, no sufficient connection between the imitative art and the object imitated. The mood of the moment is reflected in the picture, though it may be transfigured by the artist's endeavour to represent to his own satisfaction, not so much the superficial likeness, as the essential characteristics which combine to form a real and intrinsic resemblance.

Ruskin, in his *Modern Painters*, draws the distinction between the various kinds of portraiture. "One portrait of a man," he says, "may possess exact accuracy of feature, and no atom of expression. . . . Another may have neglected or misre-

presented the features, but may have given the flash of the eye, and the peculiar radiance of the lip, seen on him only in his hours of highest mental excitement. . . . Another may have given none of his ordinary expressions, but one which he wore in the most excited instants of his life, when all his secret passions and all his highest powers were brought into play at once." It is evident that the last two kinds of portrait embody a higher degree of truth, though it would be less easy for one who was not intimately acquainted with the person represented to recognise the resemblance. On the other hand, as works of art, they stand on an incomparably higher level than the portraits which merely give the most obvious features.

Considerations of this nature illustrate the difficulty of forming a satisfactory conception of the characters of men from pictorial representation. As an example, one may take the portrait of Pope Julius II. in the Pitti Gallery at Florence, with its replicas in the Uffizzi and in the National Gallery. It is immaterial to discuss the question whether it was

actually painted by Raphael himself, or whether it was painted by his pupil Giovanni da Udine from the master's original cartoon. In either case it may be regarded as a type of the portraits which do most to represent with consummate art a real man in the truth of nature. Yet is there anybody who, if he were ignorant of that pontiff's career, would infer, from the contemplation of his careworn features, that he was looking upon the portrait of one of the most ambitious men the world has ever produced? Or, again, who is there who, by viewing Holbein's portrait of Wolsey, would be able to form an adequate idea of the personality of the great cardinal? Who would be able to grasp the characteristics of the Emperor Charles V. from the admirable portraits by Titian? And the same might be said of the best-known portraits of eminent men by a Rembrandt, or a Vandyke, or a Reynolds, or a Gainsborough, or a Lawrence. Worthy of all praise as they may be as works of art, they do not enable one who is unacquainted with the originals to realise the essential character of the

persons depicted. In looking upon them one appreciates the truth of the old maxim, that *multo melius ex sermone quam lineamentis de moribus hominum iudicamus*.

There are, no doubt, certain features which at once strike the eye and the imagination, and point to the development of this or that aspect of a man's nature. Thus it is not difficult to judge from a portrait whether he is intellectual or unintellectual, strong or feeble in will, obstinate or pliable. Deeper than that it is impossible to penetrate. Neither does a statue enable a man's true self to be perceived. The sight, for example, of the bust of Socrates suggests the thought that he alone, or almost alone, among the Greeks, possessed a snub nose; and, although the shape of his head affords indications of great mental power, none of the essential characteristics of his genius and of his temperament can well be discerned.

Portraiture, however, in one form or another, has always enjoyed, and always will enjoy, popularity among mankind, apart from its artistic merits or demerits.

It is a source of delectation similar to that which affected Achilles at the sight of the figures engraved on the shield with which Thetis sought to console him after the death of Patroclus. From the earliest times there are indications of the existence of the art. Linear representation is everywhere anterior to writing. The excavations carried out in Egypt have proved that the delineation of the human form was practised at all periods of its history, in painting, or in sculpture, or in both. The discoveries at Pompeii and at Herculaneum have afforded ocular demonstration of what was the nature of the work of the *imaginum pictores* in the Roman world. The portraits of authors painted by them were frequently, as we know, placed over the bookcases in which their writings were preserved. In all ages, in fact, attempts have been made, with varied success, to reproduce the external features of men, and though it has been given to few painters to approximate to the knowledge of the human form possessed by a Michael Angelo, or to follow in the footsteps of a Titian, the

wish to represent and give permanence to the features of one's fellow-men has always existed, in either a rudimentary or an advanced stage, even if the form it has assumed has been merely the reproduction of a head on a coin.

An examination of the Egyptian monuments shows that, in the earliest known stages of art in that country, at the time when the Pyramids were built, the presentation of faces and features was less formal and conventional, and more in accordance with nature, than it afterwards became. The painted statues of Rahotep and his wife Nefert are full of intense and life-like expression, and the well-known "wooden man of Boulâk," also belonging to the same period, is marked by the same characteristics. The statues of the shepherd kings, too, represent real human beings, with their thoughts and passions stamped upon their faces. With the reign of the first Rameses commences the conventional phase, which is generally associated with the conception of Egyptian art, and which is rendered familiar on many a monument and many a tablet. It recalls

the period, in the history of English portrait-painting, which produced what Macaulay calls "the round-faced peers, as like each other as eggs, who look out from the middle of the periwigs of Kneller."

Whether it be conventional or unconventional, whether it be a work of art or merely, as Johnson puts it, "valuable in families," portraiture has the merit of bringing home forcibly to the mind the thought that, in the history of the world, the actors have been men with like parts and passions with ourselves, and thereby increasing the human interest to be found in the study of the past. Hence arises the advantage of viewing the national life of a country with the aid afforded by collections of portraits, such as are to be seen in the National Portrait Gallery or in the Palace of Versailles, or by such works as those of Lodge or of Granger; hence, also, the advantage of studying, whenever it is possible, the pictorial representation of events from contemporary sources. The impression thus produced is more vivid and more lasting than one which is formed with-



out the co-operation of the organs of vision. Painting is, as the saying runs, *falsa veritas et muta poesis*; and, though it may not be possible to judge the men of the past aright by the presentments of their outward appearance, the aspect of them engenders in the mind the feeling that, after all, they were real, tangible beings, who felt, who thought, who acted in their day, and the tenor of whose lives was akin to our own.



## CHAPTER XII

### IMAGINATIVE LITERATURE

IN the foregoing chapters an attempt has been made to review briefly the various methods by which the personality of the men of the past can be reproduced. History, biography, autobiography, diaries, memoirs, correspondence, table-talk, characterisation, monumental inscriptions, portraiture, have each in turn been surveyed, with the object of ascertaining, as far as possible, how much light they may be expected to throw on the lives and characters of those who have gone before us. There remains to be considered the mode by which, more than by any other, the spirit of past times is infused into the present, and a vivid conception is formed of what men really were. For

one person who has read Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey*, a thousand are able to picture to themselves his character from the dramatic presentation put forth by Shakespeare. To them he is a living being, endowed with all the attributes of humanity, not a mere name "to point a moral or adorn a tale." For one person who has read Mommsen or the *Commentaries*, a thousand can realise, from what they see and hear on the stage, what manner of man was Cæsar, what were his motives, his ambitions, his disappointments, in what consisted his real greatness. Richard the Lion-hearted is a more real personage to us in the pages of Sir Walter Scott than in the pages of the minutest chronicler, and one forms a better conception of Richelieu's aims and views from Alfred de Vigny's *Cinq-Mars*, than from the perusal of even the best memoir-writers of that day.

In answer to the question, "How can a poet teach us with anything like the same certainty as the historian," Hare replies: "Just as a chemist may illustrate the operations of nature by an

experiment of his own devising, with greater clearness and precision than any outward appearances will allow of. The poet has his principles of human nature, which he is to embody and to impersonate; for to deny his having a mind stored with such principles is to deny his being a poet. The historian, on the other hand, has his facts, which he is to set in order and to animate." Both deal with interpretation, though their methods of interpretation may be different; but, as Aristotle puts it, poetry has a higher truth, and a higher seriousness, in spite of the fact that it deals with things as they should be, whilst history deals with them as they are.

The creative faculty, the productive imagination, which gives life to the beings of past times, is possessed in the highest degree by such poets as Homer, Sophocles, Dante, and Shakespeare, and, in a minor measure, by many another poet in verse and prose. It is not only in the majestic movement of events depicted in an epic poem, it is not only in the conflict of passions represented in the grandest dramas, that the

creative faculty finds fit scope for its exercise. Achilles in the *Iliad*, Antigone in the tragedy of Sophocles, Ugolino in the *Inferno*, Macbeth, and Hamlet, and Othello, Milton's Satan, Goethe's Mephistopheles, are all real personages who live and move in our presence. The same is the case with the best comedies in which human nature is portrayed : Dionysius and Xanthias, in the *Frogs* of Aristophanes, have their counterparts in every-day life ; and Molière's Tartuffe and Misanthrope, in the delineation of whose characters there is less of the exaggeration of caricature, and a nearer approach to ordinary standards, are felt by the reader in a still greater degree to be actual beings. The best works of fiction, too, bring home to us with equal vividness the characters set forth. Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim, Colonel Newcome and Barnes Newcome, David Copperfield and Mr. Micawber, Jane Eyre, Jean Valjean, le père Goriot, Adam Bede and Dinah Morris, are, each in his or her degree, and each in a different manner, real persons to us. It matters

little whether they are built, or not, upon a foundation of fact, or how far the novelist's experience of himself and of others has contributed to the formation of the conceptions which he has embodied in his characters. What is essential is that they should be endowed with life, and that their actions, their feelings, their sayings, their thoughts, should be the inevitable outcome of the attributes imparted to them by the creative afflatus which has called them into existence.

Similar considerations apply to the historical novel. It is of less consequence that perfect accuracy of detail should form the basis of the narrative, than that the conception of the characters should be such as to place before us real, living beings. Sir Walter Scott possessed a mastery of details superior to that of many of the best historians ; but that qualification would not have been sufficient to ensure his success if he had not been imbued in a yet greater degree with a power of vivid imagination, which infuses vitality into his works, and which enables him, to an extent

which has never been excelled, to make the right person say the right thing at the right time. He carries himself, and thereby carries his readers with him, into the past, and clothes himself in the garb of his own characters, speaking their language, and giving expression to their thoughts. It is necessary that the great historical novelist, like Hamlet's player,

"in a fiction, in a dream of passion,  
Should force his soul so to his own conceit  
That from her working all his visage wann'd,  
Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,  
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting  
With forms to his conceit!"

It is so with George Eliot's presentment of Savonarola in *Romola*. She may not have been acquainted with all the facts which are brought together in Professor Villari's admirable biography, but her conception is marked by breadth and truth. It is so with Alfred de Vigny's portrait of Richelieu, and with Scott's delineation of Mary, Queen of Scots. Each of those writers was successful in putting himself in the place of the person with whom he was dealing. No doubt there are differences in the mode

and in the quality of treatment, dependent on the extent of the writer's sympathy with the character he depicts. Scott, for instance, who is at his best when he places before us *Ivanhoe* or *Rob Roy*, *Rebecca* or *Jeanie Deans*, the *Antiquary* or *Dominie Sampson*, is at his worst when he endeavours to represent Cromwell in *Woodstock*. His heart is divided between Scotland and chivalry, and he is therefore unable, owing to lack of sympathy, to grasp the essential features of the Protector's character. In comparison with Scott one perceives the real greatness of Shakespeare, whose genius is as universal, and whose sympathies are as wide, as humanity itself. ✓ | 31

Imaginative literature frequently assumes, for the purpose of producing the impression of verisimilitude, the various forms by which the personality of the men of the past is, in point of fact, habitually reproduced and perpetuated. In the last century, for instance, letters constituted the favourite form : Richardson makes use of them in *Clarissa Harlowe*, Rousseau in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Goethe in the *Leiden des Jungen*



*Werthers*. *Tom Jones* resembles a biography, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Tristram Shandy* autobiographies. The tales told by Boccaccio and Chaucer are placed by the former in the mouths of the lords and ladies who had taken refuge at Fiesole to escape from the plague, and, by the latter, in the mouths of the Canterbury pilgrims: they purport, therefore, to represent a record of conversation, much in the same way as the tales in the *Arabian Nights* are supposed to be related by Scheherazade. In a different manner the modern novel, of the type to which Disraeli's *Coningsby* may be said to belong, is largely composed of table-talk. In a still more marked degree Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead* and Landor's *Imaginary Conversations* take the form of the winged words that pass from one person to another. Characterisation predominates in the analytical novel, of which examples of a different kind may be found, to take contemporary authors, in the writings of Paul Bourget and of William Howells; whilst in the sensational works of fiction, in which the study of character is entirely subordi-

nated to the interest arising out of the task of unravelling an intricate plot, full of startling incidents and situations, we often find a combination of narrative, letters, diary, and conversation, as is the case in Wilkie Collins's *Woman in White*.

✓ In the variety of form assumed by the works of the writers whose names have here been cited in strange juxtaposition, is manifested a desire to convey to the reader the notion that the characters represented bear a close resemblance to actual beings. The highest works of imagination, however, do not aim at verisimilitude. Shakespeare, for example, loses nothing in our estimation by reason of his disregard for chronological or geographical accuracy. It matters little that he should speak in *Winter's Tale* of the coast of Bohemia, or that he should, in *Troilus and Cressida*, place a quotation from Aristotle in the mouth of Hector. His insight into character is not impaired by the fact that the historical personages whom he represents speak the language and think the thoughts of the Elizabethan age. That

language, we feel, would have been inevitably uttered and those thoughts would have been inevitably entertained by any man placed in like circumstances, if endowed with the character conceived by the poet. With Shakespeare the details derive their truth from the truth of the conception to which they owe their origin. The latter constitutes the spirit, the soul, the essence of the work ; the former are the casual and accidental elements in its composition. Where there is reality there is no need for the semblance of reality. Thence arises his indifference as to form. Form with him represents the "trappings and suits" in which ideas are clothed. His conceptions may be said to weave their own vesture. ✓

The extent to which the imagination may enable conceptions to be formed apart from definite facts and apart from external aids, may be illustrated by the impression produced on the mind by the greatest works of musical composers. Beethoven's *Eroica* symphony was written under the influence of the feelings aroused by the spectacle of Napoleon's

career of conquest, and, although the dedication was altered, the conceptions the symphony affords of warlike achievement, victorious progress, gratified ambition, conflict of emotions, and supremacy of will, are all the deeper and all the truer owing to the fact that music appeals to the inner consciousness, and gives expression to that which is inexpressible either in language or in colour, inasmuch as it forms part of the essential nature of things. So too the symphony of Mozart, which was afterwards called by the name of *Jupiter*, conveys a better notion of Omnipotence than is afforded by the definitions of a philosopher or by the sublimest language of a Dante or a Milton.

Even in the domain of science, in which the greatest precision is required in the ascertainment of particular facts, imagination plays a part of no mean importance. "With accurate experiment and observation to work upon," says Professor Tyndall in his discourse delivered before the British Association at Liverpool in 1870, "imagination becomes the architect of physical theory.

Newton's passage from a falling apple to a falling moon was an act of the prepared imagination, without which the 'laws of Kepler' could never have been traced to their foundations. Out of the facts of chemistry the constructive imagination of Dalton formed the atomic theory. Davy was richly endowed with the imaginative faculty, while with Faraday its exercise was incessant, preceding, accompanying, and guiding all his experiments. . . . Without the exercise of this power our knowledge of nature would be a mere tabulation of coexistences and sequences."

Such being the power of the imagination, it is impossible that the mere accumulation of details should be able to convey adequate impressions, as compared with those which are built up with its aid. Hence it is that the highest works of imagination present us with characters more real than those which are set forth in the records of the past. Hence, too, arises the necessity for imagination in historic writers, and, indeed, in all who endeavour to reproduce and perpetuate the men of

bygone ages—not the imagination which converts a history into a novel, but that which groups facts in such a way as to bring out their true significance, gives light and life to events and individuals, and imparts to the whole that unity in diversity which is the essential characteristic of Gibbon's great work and of the other masterpieces of historic genius.



## INDEX OF NAMES OF PERSONS

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p> <b>ACHILLES</b>, 119, 126<br/> <b>Addison</b>, 104<br/> <b>Adrian</b>, 9<br/> <b>Agamemnon</b>, 8<br/> <b>Agesilaus</b>, 24<br/> <b>Agricola</b>, 24<br/> <b>Alexander the Great</b>, 98<br/> <b>Amiel</b>, 38, 39, 47<br/> <b>Antigone</b>, 126<br/> <b>Aristophanes</b>, 126<br/> <b>Aristotle</b>, 14, 91, 98, 125, 131<br/> <b>Arnold</b>, Matthew, 35<br/> <b>Athenaeus</b>, 81<br/> <b>Atticus</b>, 72<br/> <b>Augustine</b>, Saint, 37, 39<br/> <b>Augustus</b>, 103<br/> <b>Aulus Gellius</b>. <i>See</i> Gellius<br/> <b>Aurelius</b>, Marcus, 37<br/> <br/> <b>BALE</b>, Bishop, 22<br/> <b>Balzac</b>, 126<br/> <b>Beethoven</b>, 132<br/> <b>Bismarck</b>, 18<br/> <b>Boccaccio</b>, 130<br/> <b>Bodin</b>, 13<br/> <b>Boswell</b>, 24, 28, 32, 68, 85, 87, 88<br/> <b>Bourget</b>, 130<br/> <b>Branças</b>, Comte de, 98<br/> <b>Brantôme</b>, 58<br/> <b>Brontë</b>, Charlotte, 126 </p> | <p> <b>Browne</b>, Sir Thomas, 8<br/> <b>Browning</b>, Robert, 94<br/> <b>Bruyère</b>, La. <i>See</i> La Bruyère<br/> <b>Buckingham</b>, Duke of, 98<br/> <b>Buckle</b>, 17<br/> <b>Buffon</b>, 6<br/> <b>Burleigh</b>, Lord, 88<br/> <b>Burnet</b>, Bishop, 55, 56, 60<br/> <b>Burney</b>, Dr., 104<br/> <b>Burney</b>, Fanny, 47<br/> <b>Burton</b>, 93<br/> <br/> <b>CÆSAR</b>, 19, 54, 70, 112, 124<br/> <b>Campbell</b>, Lord, 30, 31<br/> <b>Carlyle</b>, Jane Welsh, 77<br/> <b>Carlyle</b>, Thomas, 61, 77<br/> <b>Casaubon</b>, 38, 47, 85<br/> <b>Cavendish</b>, 24, 124<br/> <b>Cellini</b>, Benvenuto, 39<br/> <b>Cervantes</b>, 126<br/> <b>Charles V.</b>, 17, 29, 117<br/> <b>Charles XII.</b>, 17<br/> <b>Châtelet</b>, Madame du, 72<br/> <b>Chaucer</b>, 94, 130<br/> <b>Chesterfield</b>, Lord, 59, 73, 74, 97, 99, 101<br/> <b>Cicero</b>, 70, 72, 77<br/> <b>Clarendon</b>, 19, 100<br/> <b>Coleridge</b>, 85, 87<br/> <b>Coleridge</b>, H. N., 85<br/> <b>Collins</b>, Wilkie, 131 </p> |
|--|---|



Commynes, Philippe de, 57  
 Condé, Prince de, 98  
 Cowper, Lord, 27  
 Croker, 59  
 Cromwell, 71, 129  
 Courier, Paul Louis, 74, 77  
 Curtius, 15

DALTON, 134  
 Dante, 4, 125, 133  
 Darwin, 50  
 Davy, Sir Humphry, 134  
 Deffand, Madame du, 75  
 Defoe, 130  
 Diana, 8  
 Dickens, 126  
 Disraeli, Benjamin, 130  
 Disraeli, Isaac, 82  
 Dodington, Bubb, 47  
 Dryden, 89, 98, 101

EARLE, Bishop, 93  
 Eliot, George, 93, 126, 128  
 Elizabeth, Queen, 93  
 Ellenborough, Lord, 50  
 Epictetus, 37  
 Evelyn, 45, 46, 47

FARADAY, 134  
 Francis I., 17  
 Frederick the Great, 73  
 Freeman, E. A., 31  
 Froissart, 56

GAINSBOROUGH, 117  
 Galileo, 4  
 Gallio, 71  
 Gellius, Aulus, 81  
 George II., 59  
 Gibbon, 14, 19, 39, 135  
 Giovanni da Udine, 117  
 Gladstone, Mr., 18  
 Goethe, 20, 39, 72, 126, 129  
 Goldoni, 39

Granger, 121  
 Greville, Charles, 47, 48, 53  
 Griffith, 25  
 Grote, 15

HALL, Bishop, 93  
 Hannibal, 19  
 Hare, Archdeacon, 115, 124  
 Hector, 131  
 Hegel, 25  
 Henry VIII., 17, 29  
 Herbert, Lord, of Cherbury,  
 40  
 Herodotus, 56  
 Herostratus, 8  
 Hervey, Lord, 59, 60  
 Hicks, Mr., 107  
 Holbein, 117  
 Homer, 94, 119, 125, 126  
 Howell, James, 65  
 Howells, W., 130  
 Hutchinson, Mrs., 24  
 Hugo, Victor, 126

JOHNSON, Dr., 22, 23, 24, 25,  
 27, 68, 85, 86, 103, 121  
 Joinville, 56  
 Julius II., 116  
 Juvenal, 101

KEPLER, 134  
 Kneller, 121  
 Knight, Charles, 80

LA BRUYÈRE, 61, 92, 94-99  
 Lackington, 39  
 Lamb, Charles, 55, 77  
 Landor, 130  
 La Rochefoucauld, 58, 95, 96  
 Lavater, 113  
 Lawrence, 117  
 Lee, Mr. Sidney, 40  
 Lespinasse, Mademoiselle de,  
 76

